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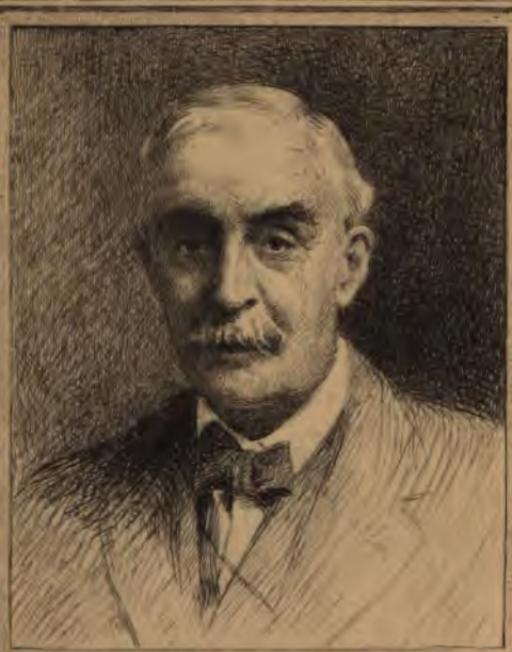
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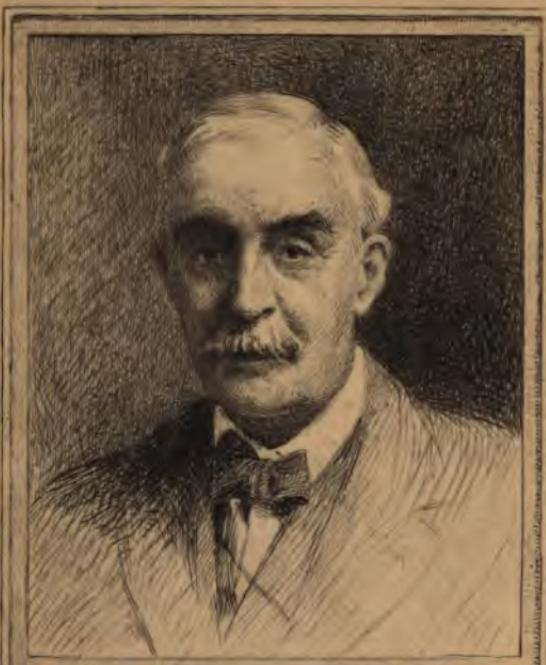
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## **THE IDEAL IN JUDAISM**



THE  
IDEAL IN JUDAISM  
AND OTHER SERMONS BY  
THE REV. MORRIS JOSEPH  
PREACHED DURING  
1890-91-92



LONDON :  
Published by DAVID NUTT  
in the STRAND  
1893

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2-21-39

3-24-39 J.A.

TO MY WIFE  
AND TO THE  
CONGREGATION WHO HAVE  
WORSHIPPED AT THE HAMPSTEAD  
SABBATH AFTERNOON  
SERVICES.



## P R E F A C E

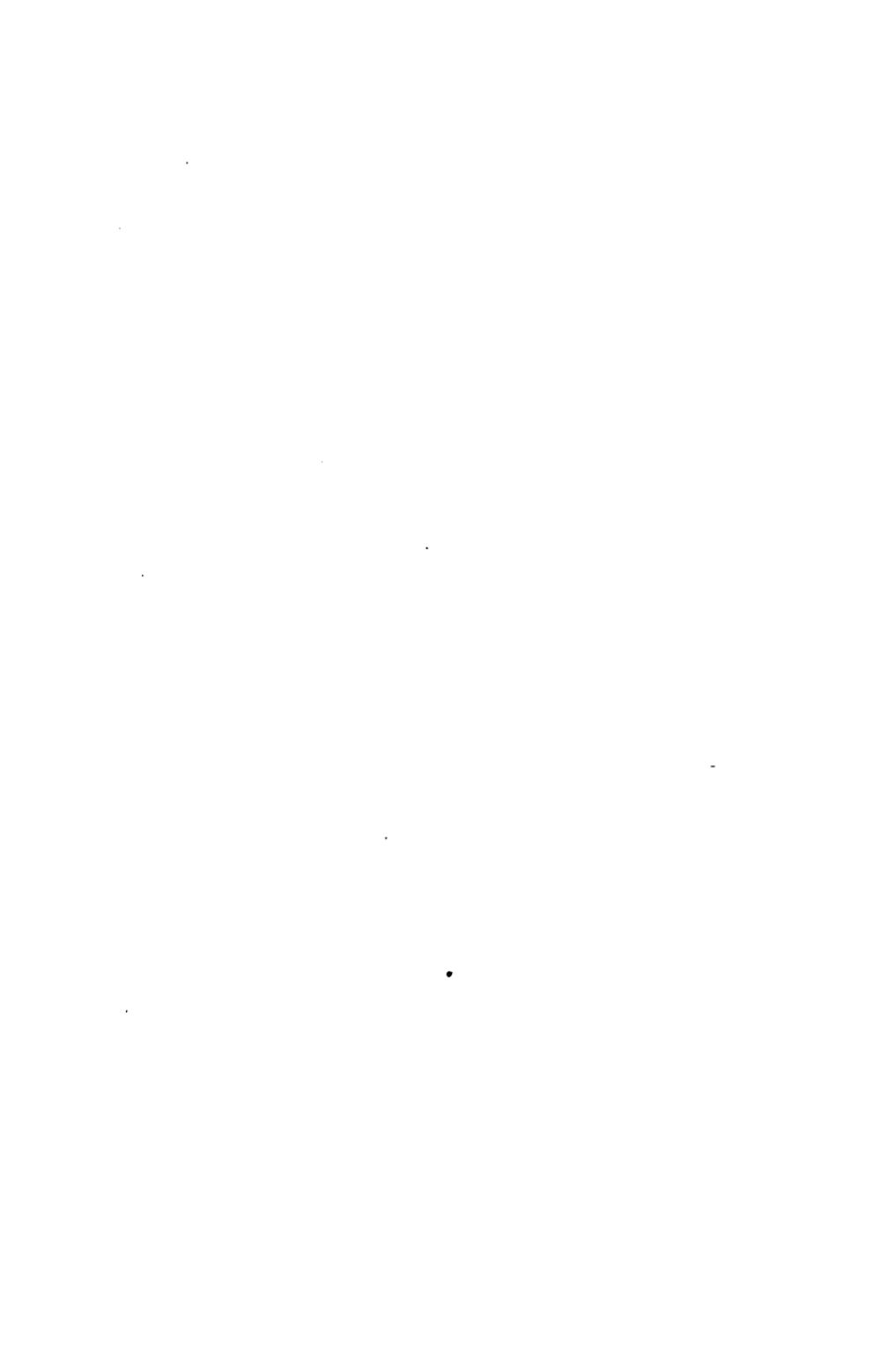
THE present volume is published at the request of several of my friends, who have signified their desire to possess, in a permanent form, a selection from the discourses which I delivered at the Hampstead Sabbath Afternoon Services. The diffidence with which I comply with that request would be even greater than it is, but for the thought that Anglo-Jewish homiletical literature is of the scantiest proportions, and that any addition to it has at least a *prima facie* claim to justification. Whether the following pages are a desirable addition, it is for the public to decide.

The title of the book, though borrowed, in conformity with familiar usage, from the initial discourse, has not been selected at haphazard. It indicates the one uniform purpose with which these sermons were written, and which, despite the diversity of

their subject-matter, establishes a fundamental likeness between them all. They were preached with the paramount object of elucidating, however inadequately, the Ideal in Judaism, of expounding those spiritual teachings of the religion which render it an effective inspiration in our day, seeing that while they at least equal in grandeur, they surpass in simplicity, those embodied in any of the other great theistic systems. Such an exposition, I venture to think, is the urgent need of an age which is fraught with peril, not merely for Judaism, but for Religion.

In determining the contents of the book—a task in which I have received most valuable assistance from my friends, Mr. Israel Abrahams and Mr. Oswald John Simon—my chief aim has been to select those discourses which promised to be useful to the largest number of my readers. At the same time, I have kept in mind the desirability of making such a selection as should be fairly representative of the entire range of doctrine taught at the Hampstead Services. Contrary to what appears to be the general impression, that doctrine was rarely polemical. The words

spoken from my pulpit were far more frequently words of hope and encouragement, such as are especially needed in these times by the many who feel their Judaism melting away under the solvent of modern criticism, and by the many more who are losing their hold on faith and duty in presence of life's grim problems. Thus, there will be found in the following pages little about those minor religious questions which divide and subdivide our community, much about the larger and infinitely more momentous difficulties which vex the conscience and disquiet the soul. Fully aware, though I am, of the many imperfections of these sermons, I would fain hope that they may prove helpful to some of the larger congregation to whom they are now addressed, and that here and there they may succeed in gaining a wavering heart for the ancestral faith and for the higher life.



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## THE IDEAL IN JUDAISM

'Behold, the rod of Aaron of the house of Levi had budded ; it put forth buds, and bare blossoms, and yielded almonds.'—NUMBERS xvii. 23.

A DAY or two before the recent festival of Pentecost, I had occasion to pass through the so-called Jewish quarter at the East End. The district, usually dingy and unattractive in the extreme, was for the nonce transfigured. Quantities of flowers, which were being sold in the streets, had turned it into a fair garden. The purchasers were of the poorest. They were buying the flowers to deck their homes for the coming Festival. Their dwellings might be humble, but to welcome the Feast of the Lord they were to become palaces. The holy season should have a right royal reception even in a Whitechapel garret.

This juxtaposition of squalor and comeliness, this striking instance of the desert being made to blossom as the rose, brought home to me the truth that, whatever might be said to the contrary, Judaism is a religion of ideals. The men and women of low degree who were

buying these flowers may not have invested the incident in which they were taking part with all the symbolic meaning I discerned in it, but some of it they must have felt. On the face of it, the act was a poetic act—one that told of refinement, of reverence for something higher than the sordid. A coarse and unimaginative person would have kept his money in his pocket, or spent it in drink.

Now, this feeling for the ideal, which is to be found in East End hovels as well as in Mayfair mansions, is the work of Judaism.

Had it not been for his religion, the Jew, thanks to a hostile world, would have had nothing to strive after beyond the means of satisfying his lower cravings, nothing to live for save mere life itself—life in its grosser aspects. In spite of crushing disaster and demoralising oppression, he has never lost his hold either on hope or on virtue. He has been imprisoned in a ghetto, but his spirit has soared beyond it into an ampler air—into the realms of the ideal, of which no mortal hand, however tyrannical, may presume to hold the key. Shut out from the world, he has made a fair world for himself, peopled with the brightest forms—with faith, resignation, duty, in whose company he has lived, and nobly lived. Throughout the long night of persecution the star that promised the dawn has

never vanished from the heavens, and the bitter waters of the world's contumely have been for ever sweetened by the magic influence of religion. It is not only that a fixed belief in a Messianic Redeemer saved the Israelite of the Middle Ages from despair and from the vices of the desperate ; he was kept from degradation by an all-penetrating religion which sanctified the commonest details of his daily life. Every man's hand was against him ; but what could man do to him, seeing that God was with him always, when he was sitting in the house, when he was walking by the way, when he was lying down, and when he was rising up ? Yes, and above all when he was sitting in the house. A pariah, an outcast, condemned at times to be literally a fugitive and a vagabond, he found, by a fine anomaly, the imperishable roots of his nobility in his home. Here was a commonplace domain which might have yielded only thorns and thistles, but which, under the touch of a mystic hand, became a Garden of Eden. The miracle of old was repeated ; the rod placed before the Lord became fair with bud and blossom and fruit ; the home-life was lived in the Divine Presence, and though outwardly it was lowly and unpromising, yet that Presence made it glorious. The home was idealised ; it became a sanctuary ; its

table was an altar, the meal a solemn sacrifice, the father a ministering priest. The Divine name written on the doorpost was but a symbol of the holiness with which the house was invested. Not prayer only, but every act, however familiar, performed within its hallowed precincts, was worship. Is it a marvel that the mediæval Israelite kept his integrity when all his surroundings were base, seeing that once more, as in the far-off days, religion stood on his behalf between the dead and the living—between a world spiritually dead and the souls that were quickened with the fear of the Lord—and that for him the plague of corruption was stayed? Morally, the Jew would have perished long since, had it not been for his power to aspire, to live out of himself, to seek to inaugurate the days of heaven upon earth.

And the same saving influence is still at work. The over-driven tailor of the East End, whose woes stir a Parliament with compassion, cherishes ideals which yield him a solace and a strength his sympathisers dream not of. The pathos of his life springs not from its wretchedness alone, but from the simple joys and the moral sweetness which he opposes to his misery, and which it is unable to kill. The sanctity of the home is still a Jewish ideal in Whitechapel. The flowers

with which Pentecost is welcomed in the dwellings of the poor are but emblems. What they symbolise is the peace and the purity which, triumphing over hostile surroundings, still characterise the home-life of our humbler classes. Those features stand out in bold relief in the domestic celebration of a festival by the Jewish poor. If they followed the example before their eyes, it would become the occasion for the riotous self-indulgence which too often goes to make an English holiday. Instead, there is self-control, dignity, the feeling that the day and the house are alike holy to the Lord.

Reverence for the home, the most fruitful of Jewish ideals, is the secret of half the virtues of our toiling class. It clothes the poor garret with unspeakable charm in the eyes of its indwellers, so that for them there is literally no place like home, and the public-house cannot compete with it for their favour. It imparts a sanctity to family life, turning the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents, binding the members of the household to each other in an enduring bond of loyalty and love.

While the old conception of family life survives, the Jew will not want for a potent source of the noblest inspiration. But I

cannot hide from myself the fact that, under the stress of new conditions and evil example, that conception is in danger of becoming blurred and indistinct. Even among the poor the home is not quite the ennobling force it was. The rod still blossoms as of yore, but the canker is beginning to show itself in the flower with alarming frequency. Among those of higher social station the danger has attained at least equally serious proportions. Let us beware lest we lose this cherished ideal, lest the sanctity of domestic life—the fabric that has weathered the storms of centuries—crumble away under the too fierce heat of prosperity, and carry with it all our precious things—purity, peace, religion. We are fain to consecrate the house with prayer when we first take up our abode in it; but better still is the consecration that is wrought by the lives of its indwellers—by that reverence for the home which inspires them with mutual forbearance and love, which arms them with the self-control needful for battling with the world's temptations, for resisting the onslaught of their own ignoble passions. If our whole moral life is not to be in danger of shipwreck, let us renew, ere it is too late, our covenant with this ideal of our fathers.

This sanctification of the home is, of course, only one instance of the transfiguration of the

common elements of life which is so eminently characteristic of our religion. Judaism claims for the ideal the whole domain of the actual ; it has annexed the world, and established there the kingdom of heaven. But there has been no sacrifice of sublimity in consequence. A recent writer<sup>1</sup> seems to imply that the ideals of Sinai are narrower than those embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. But his very proofs are his all-sufficient refutation. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and might.' 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' 'Love thine enemy.' These are the maxims of the Gospels, it is true ; but they are also the doctrine of Judaism, and it was Judaism that taught that doctrine first. No ; we have nothing to be ashamed of in our moral and spiritual teachings, unless it be our failure to come within measurable distance of completely fulfilling them. I say, measurable distance, for that ideal only is worthy of the name which is impossible of attainment. There can be no finality in moral effort. The goal must be an ever-receding one ; for the race, the endeavour, and not the goal, is the prize. Every peak we scale must disclose yet higher pinnacles to which we have to climb. 'The better we may reach, but not the best ; but no one ever

<sup>1</sup> Count Tolstoi in the *Universal Review* for June 1890.

found the better who did not aim at the best.<sup>1</sup> And surely the best is to be found in those precepts of the ancient Law which summon us to a perfection that can never be ours, but to which we can ever draw nearer and nearer. The whole-hearted love of God, the fulfilment of the yearning to be at one with Him in spirit by means of a perfect obedience—this can never be our lot, in this life at least. But the Pentateuch bids us aspire after it, and every Psalm echoes the command. ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’—a simple and a familiar maxim indeed, but an utterly impossible one. Upon it for a foundation the whole Bible is built. But its impossibility is its glory. To strive to obey it is at once to fail and to succeed—to fail in realising the whole ideal, to succeed in exalting ourselves by our very effort. It is a glorious will-o’-the-wisp that allures us. But it leads us, not into a morass, but to a paradise, not to death, but to life—the true life of self-control and self-surrender.

The measure of the vitality of a religion is the impossibility, that is, the nobility, of its ideals. And if this be true, Judaism has a long life before it. At first sight, it must be owned, it compares unfavourably, as a source of inspiration, with Christianity, owing to the

<sup>1</sup> Moncure Conway, *Idols and Ideals*, p. 183.

lack of that central figure whose sufferings and charm of character move our neighbours to alternate sympathy and emulation. But the Jew has, in truth, a similar ideal. If it inspires him not, it is because he does not seek for it. For what can thrill us more powerfully than the spectacle of Israel's devotion and martyrdom? What eloquence can rival that of the appeal which every line of our history, written as it is with the life-blood of our heroes, makes to us to be true to the faith, loyal to duty, staunch champions of religion and righteousness whatever the cost? Those Jews who sigh for an example which rightly inspires their fellows of another creed, need but to ponder their own story in order to still their longing. Therefore, I say, let our children more diligently learn the history of their race; it is the one trustworthy means of keeping them Jews in these days, of showing them that their religion is still worth living for, that it is a sacred legacy of the past, deserving of all their devotion, all their chivalry.

And here, finally, we catch a glimpse of the secret source whence Judaism draws its wondrous strength. 'That religion,' to quote the same writer once more, 'seals its own doom which binds itself to a defunct ideal.'<sup>1</sup> The saying is true. But Judaism has not so bound

<sup>1</sup> *Idols and Ideals*, p. 181.

## 10 THE IDEAL IN JUDAISM

itself. All its ideals are living—some for one soul, some for another. It is a well-spring of inspiration for the most diverse minds—from the weary worker in the squalid East End court, with his cheering dream of a Messiah who will one day rout all the sorrows of the poor with one swift and merciful blow, to his richer brother in the fashionable West, whose Judaism calls upon him to bring nearer the Golden Age by foreshadowing its moral beauty in the nobility of his own life. One downcast spirit, overweighted with the burden and the mystery of the world, it soothes and strengthens with pictures of a heaven, where the righteous sit crowned with glory and basking in the sunshine of the Divine Presence, where all the problems of this life are to be solved, and all its sorrows compensated with a bliss that no tongue can describe, no mind conceive, where the lost ones who have gone before shall fold those who have joined them at last in one long, never-ending embrace. Another spirit of a different mould it gladdens and stimulates with other visions—with tidings of the glory, not of the heavenly, but of the earthly life, with the thought of the inherent grandeur of righteousness, the inimitable sublimity of self-sacrifice, with the promise of that ineffably sweet satisfaction that springs from the strenuous endeavour to do the right in the teeth of

difficulty and temptation. And so, because, like the murmur of the great ocean, it tells a tale that changes with the mood of the listener, Judaism can never die. The High Priest's rod bears at one and the same time bud and blossom and fruit—truth in the germ, truth ever developing, and truth that is ripe; and the human soul, in every stage of its development, can find in it the one message it needs for solace and inspiration.

## WHY AM I A JEW ?

'Verily, all the nations walk every one in the name of his god ; but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'—MICAH iv. 5.

**A** QUESTION which I raised incidentally in the course of a recent sermon<sup>1</sup> may not unprofitably be made the theme of our reflections to-day : Why am I a Jew ? For every Israelite who puts this question to himself, there are perhaps a thousand others who have never even asked it ; and of the few who do ask it, many, I fear, are content to dismiss it unanswered. And yet every one who shrinks from degrading religion to the level of mere superstition must see that he asks, and that he is answered. For if our Judaism is an unreasoned sentiment—a piece of mechanism moving automatically without conviction for its motive power—if it is a mere birthmark, it is not true religion. Belief must be justified to the intellect if it is to be clear of the charge of credulity, and the mere accident of having been born a Jew is no sufficient explanation of our Judaism. Even faith is too dearly bought if its price is the surrender of our thinking

<sup>1</sup> The Sermon on 'The Election of Israel.'

powers. God gave us 'godlike reason,' as the great dramatist terms it; and to Him and to our higher selves we have to answer for every neglect of the gift. Nor have we to fear that the most critical investigation will destroy Religion. For the religion that cannot endure the searching heat of the mind's crucible is tinsel; it does not bear the stamp of truth, which, as the Rabbins have well said, is God's own seal. Faith, in such a case, is the mark of ignorance or, paradox though it seems, a practical confession of scepticism—the mental state which prompts the fallacious cry, 'I believe because it is impossible'—as though the impossible could ever command belief. Reason cannot injure true Religion, for true Religion is reason.

Nay, however powerfully blind faith may rule conduct, its sway cannot be compared for stability, or even for strength, with the faith that springs from conviction. The roots of reasoned Religion are in the calm and steadfast mind, not in the fickle, changeful emotions, and the storm of doubt only drives them deeper. Those who thus build up their creed slowly and painfully, with many searchings of heart, are like him of whom the poet sings:—

' . . . In whom persuasion and belief  
Had ripened into faith, and faith become  
A passionate intuition.'

They love their religion with all their heart and soul and might ; for that love has fused together all the capacities of their being in one glorious amalgam, and, loving it thus, they draw from it an inspiration which hallows all their lives, and which never wanes while life endures.

It becomes, therefore, a matter of supreme necessity, a truly religious duty, to apply the test of reason to Judaism, or—to use the phrase with which we set out—to ask ourselves why we are Jews. And is it possible to give a satisfactory reply to the question ? If, shaking off the mental indolence which evades the most necessary and the most momentous self-questionings, we seek for the foundations of Judaism, shall we find them to be rock or sand ? Is the ancient religion of our race reared on the basis of reason, which alone can ensure its permanence in an age when critical analysis insists upon rending the veil which hides the most sacred things ? This is the question we have to ask ourselves, and only if we can answer it in the affirmative will Judaism be vindicated, and our loyalty to it justified. And of a surety we can answer it thus. For which of our essential teachings is there that is not in unison with modern knowledge and thought ? God—one, impalpable, all-powerful—the central idea of Judaism, where is the

man of science with his brand-new microscope who can refute it?

For years, Agnosticism—a polite term invented to take the place of the older and the blunter word Atheism—was his creed, which he asserted with a dogmatism not to be surpassed by the most fanatical religionist. But to him, in his turn, time has brought the philosophic mind, and he has confessed his error. In vain did he attempt as with an air-pump to exhaust the theory of the universe of the idea of God; he could not detach nature from the Divine Mind that works unceasingly everywhere, and from which all things have sprung. Physical science, with balance and plummet, with its obstinate endeavours to track matter and life to their birthplace, has discovered something it could not weigh or gauge, has been led in its quest face to face with a Power before which it has fallen back silent and confounded—

‘ . . . Something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.’

And this Spirit is the God whom Judaism postulates. Nor is His oneness less unequi-

vocally affirmed by science than His existence. 'One God, one law, one element' is as emphatically the doctrine of nineteenth century thought as it was of Moses and the Prophets. The unity of Nature, the one consistent and harmonious purpose that underlies its phenomena, is but the mirror of the Mind that created and controls it. Truly, the Israelite of old who was martyred for the faith, and who in his death-agony remembered to fling his battle-cry, 'The Lord is One,' in the teeth of an idolatrous world, has been amply avenged in these latter days, and by no hand more conspicuously than that of science itself.

And of this one God, Judaism declares that He has not only made the Universe, but that He is in it, that He has not merely fashioned the hearts of men, but that He understands all their acts, that He is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed. Is this true? Is there a Divine government of the world, and are Justice and Equity the foundations of its throne? Who can doubt it that reads the face of Nature, that ponders the stirring page of history—nay, that looks into his own heart, his own life? At times, it is true, the clew to the Divine rectitude is lost, and we stand in fear and despair before some terrible outbreak of Nature's pent-up forces,

dealing wholesale and seemingly purposeless death, or before some spectacle of individual suffering coming as the sole reward of a virtuous life. But our doubt should be but momentary. The tempest-broken ship, the flooded town, the pit which fire or poisoned air has made into a tomb, hide the Divine righteousness from our eyes; but it shines forth again, like the bow that glorifies the dark cloud, in the song of the bird, in the glint of the sun on the sea, in the love of our dear ones, in the thought of the bounty and the loveliness which sustains all living things and ministers to their happiness. Contrary to the Psalmist's experience we see the righteous apparently forsaken, and it is the sinner whom God seems to keep as the apple of His eye; but the world's great annals, which reveal the whole plan and not mere fragments of it—nay, even our own experiences, if we will but listen to them—bid us hold fast to our faith in the ultimate triumph of right, in the never-halting justice, the sleepless love of the Supreme. Divine revelation ever renewing itself, human responsibility that never ends, the truth that God has given men His law—a law written with a pen of iron in the conscience of humanity, and vindicated, slowly but surely, in the lives of nations and individuals—a law which no one shall dare to

break with impunity, and in whose fulfilment happiness is alone to be found—this is the outcome of our knowledge to-day; and this is Judaism.

Is there *ought* more? Yes, there is the idea that we Israelites are God's witnesses—a microcosm reflecting the stupendous truths which flash forth from Nature and human life. This conception has its foundation in sober fact;<sup>1</sup> and every attempt of ours to keep it alive—every religious institution that maintains the Israelite's sympathetic connection with the storied Past, that feeds his historic consciousness—is completely justified.

And this is the essence of Jewish theology. Not one detail of it makes demands which reason would not indorse. I grant that the stream of Judaism in its passage through the ages has gathered up many elements which at best have been but temporarily useful. But these it is leaving behind at last; and we should not have met here to-day were we not persuaded that we can fit new raiment to our altered religious stature, and still remain Jews. Renan has characterised Judaism by calling it a 'minimum of religion.' And so it is, seeing how few and how simple are the articles of belief which form its necessary constituents. God, Duty, Israel's mission—

<sup>1</sup> See the Sermon on 'The Election of Israel.'

these are its chief ideas. Where is the Jew whose intelligence they stir into rebellion? There is no mystery here; no truth that needs a philosophy to expound it; no creed for which room has to be made in the mind by expelling reason from it; no lesson that a child could not grasp; no ideal that shall not suffice to lift human life to the highest pinnacle of nobility.

And thus I am led to supplement this summary of Jewish belief with a concluding word upon that other great constituent of Judaism—its moral teaching. If our theology is at once simple and sublime, so also is our ethic. It is impossible to soar to more exalted heights of spiritual truth than that to which the Jew may climb every day when he repeats the *Shemang*. And so, too, a nobler conception of duty has never been given to the world than that embodied in the old Levitical precept: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' And this maxim, which Hillel aptly quoted as the quintessence of Israel's moral law, is only the keynote. The double code of Scripture and Talmud is full of lessons equally sublime, because equally just. For, after all, morality is justice and nothing else. Kindness and mercy and love cease to be admirable—nay, cease to be moral when their bright forms cast an inevitable shadow of cruelty.

Forgiveness is only noble as long as it does not encourage wrong-doing, as long as the sinner is not spared to the injury of himself and of society. Mere abstract beauty does not make an ideal ethically sound. Judaism has recognised this truth from the first; it preaches a sane, a wholesome morality, not a spurious, a hysterical one. It has made right the basis of its ethics; and the Ten Commandments, stern but immutable, ancient but living, stand forth to-day an eloquent testimony to the justness of the principle.

Then, my brethren, let us take this Judaism of ours, tried by the test of reason and triumphantly vindicated, more closely than ever to our hearts. For among the old creeds there is none at once so simple and so glorious, with standards of duty so just and so true; among the new, none with an inspiration so fruitful as the memory of our past and the thought that we are God's elect. Let us, then, be Jews as of old—not mere mechanical items in the sum-total of the race, but earnest, active believers, cherishing the truths, and zealously discharging the duties confided to Israel in the days of old. Fervently let us exclaim with the Prophet, 'Verily, all the nations walk every one in the name of his god; but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'

## THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

'I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.'—ISAIAH xlii. 6, 7.

THE Election of Israel is one of the central and one of the noblest ideas in Judaism. It is a two-fold idea. Israel is the chosen of God—chosen as the depository of Divine truth; but he is chosen also to preach that truth to the world. For him God's law has not a message merely, but a mission. It is not only to ennable him, but through his instrumentality to teach and uplift mankind. This beautiful conception is set forth in all its fulness in the noble prayer of *Alenu*, of which the two paragraphs respectively express the two halves of the twin-idea. It is a conception, too, which runs like a golden thread throughout the Bible, though with varying sheen. That Israel is God's people, His first-born, His peculiar treasure, is a doctrine taught on almost every page. But the universal aspect of the truth—the idea that the spiritual blessings conferred on Israel

are held by him only in trust for humanity at large, to whom he is, in turn, to extend them —this is less frequently set forth in explicit terms. It finds its clearest expression in the glowing words of the prophets, and especially in the concluding chapters of Isaiah. The text is one example among many: 'I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.'

And yet, even when this broader doctrine is not plainly taught, it is often present like an undertone, to be caught by the sensitive ear. Already in the far-off days of Sinai, when Israel had hardly begun to roll away the reproach of Egypt, to purge himself of the taint of slavery, when his religion still was young, he received his charter from the Divine hands: 'Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'<sup>1</sup> Surely, the ideal the words shadowed forth was something higher than a mere self-contained sanctity. A kingdom of priests pre-supposes a congregation to minister to—a world-wide congregation whom they are to imbue with the truths they

themselves have learnt from God's own lips, whom they are to uplift by the force of their own splendid example. They are to be a holy nation; but their sanctity is to leap from them like a flame from a central fire, until it has kindled the whole world.

I have said that the idea is a beautiful one. And, in saying so, I have not forgotten that there are many to whom it is a stumbling-block. To call ourselves the chosen people—to assert that God has revealed Himself especially to us—savour, it is said, of arrogance. God is the All-Father, we are reminded, and He extends His love and His favours to all His children alike. But where is the arrogance? Does it lie in the thought that there has been vouchsafed to us a larger share of the Divine truth than has been given to other men? Surely not. For if we did not believe this, we should deny the superiority of our own creed, and our allegiance to Judaism would be unmeaning. Why am I a Jew, if it be not because I think that Israel's religion is the purest expression of theological truth and the embodiment of the noblest ideals of duty that have ever been given to the world? Every religionist would make the same claim on behalf of his own system. In this sense he regards himself and his fellow-believers as God's elect. If we are guilty of arrogance on

such grounds, we share the guilt with every conscientious religious thinker under the sun.

Or are we arrogant because we speak of ourselves as a favoured race? With what have we been favoured? with wealth, prosperity, dominion? Let every line of our history answer. 'Israel is my son, my first-born'<sup>1</sup>—this is the prelude to the Divine summons which calls on Pharaoh to set the Hebrews free. And what is the sequel of that summons? What is the result of that freedom? Spiritual servitude and worldly disadvantage. The gates of Egypt open the road to Sinai, but to the terrible wilderness as well; and the wilderness is the avenue to a troubled life lasting through the centuries. Israel has gained Religion by being the chosen of God, but in gaining it he has lost the world. 'Despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'<sup>2</sup>—truly the legend of his whole life-story. Perpetual unrest, woe almost without surcease, gloom brightened by merely passing gleams—this has been his lot from the day he became God's own unto this day. The very religion which was a sign of the Divine favour, in vouchsafing to him the joy of 'a free spirit'—the spirit that can soar unhindered to God's own throne—has laid upon his life the heaviest

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iv. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah liii. 3.

yoke. Who so restricted in his personal liberty as the Jew? Who so bound in by the bonds of duty? 'The yoke of the kingdom of Heaven' has been for him no unmeaning phrase. Verily, there is a germ of truth in the old Talmudic legend<sup>1</sup> which tells how the Law was refused by the various nations in turn because of the stringency of its enactments, because of its excessive demands on their self-denial. Surely, had he consulted his selfish interests, Israel, too, might well have asked to be delivered from the burden of Judaism, to be spared the title and the responsibilities of God's elect. To this very day the Rabbi seeks to dissuade the would-be proselyte by enumerating the exacting claims which the religion he would embrace makes upon the devotion of its adherents.

In the material sense, then, we have gained nothing by being the favourites of Heaven save what other men would reject—the pain of self-conquest and the suffering inflicted by a hostile world. Is it, then, in any spirit of arrogance that Israel takes the name assigned to him by Holy Writ, that he wears the crown—a veritable crown of martyrdom, glorious though it be—which the Divine hand has set on his brow? May he not feel a just pride in the thought that a life-long agony has been his

Abodah Zarah, 2b.

consecration, that he has proved his right to the title and the mission of the people of God by his steadfastness under suffering? In the legendary lore of the Talmudists<sup>1</sup> there is a mysterious figure, the Messiah, son of Joseph, whose death is to herald the advent of the true Messiah, the son of David. He is the 'man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;' and it is only when his anguish is ended that the glad dawn of the Golden Age is to appear. Consciously or unconsciously the Rabbins have drawn for us here the image of Israel himself, whose teaching, given to men out of his very soul's travail, whose example, made doubly eloquent by suffering and stern self-conquest, shall help humanity along the upward road of progress, and prepare it for the coming of the great Day of the Lord. It is for this that we have been chosen, for this that we have been called. Is there any arrogance in such a belief, seeing that suffering is the price we have paid for cherishing it?

And what of the Present? Is our mandate exhausted? Assuming that Israel has, in the scheme of Providence, been assigned a mission in the past, is that mission still in our keeping, or has it been transferred to other hands? Was Judaism only to begin the great task, and to hand it over to other religions for completion?

<sup>1</sup> *Succah 52a*, etc.

Are those glorious dreams which illumine the prophetic page, which foreshadow the time when 'ten men out of all the languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'<sup>1</sup>—are those dreams unmeaning, or if they have a meaning was it one only for the men of a bygone age? The answer is written in the volume of History—that other book of God which contains the revelation of the Divine Mind. In the great story of mankind no event is in vain. No nation struts its brief hour on the stage without fulfilling a distinct purpose in the stupendous drama. Egypt, Greece, Rome, did not retire from the scene before they had played their allotted part to the end; and they disappeared only because their work was done. And Israel, their contemporary, what of him? If Rome gave laws to the world, and Greece taught it to appreciate the beautiful, Israel offered it the knowledge of the true God and the noblest ethical ideals. But, unlike those great Powers, he still lives; and what is the secret of his survival, if it be not that the mission assigned to him is even yet not wholly accomplished? How many weary leagues has not humanity still to traverse before the final goal is reached, before 'the one far-off Divine

<sup>1</sup> Zech. viii. 23.

event' comes to pass, 'to which the whole creation moves'! What a load of sin and woe has to be lifted from its stooping shoulders, what mists of spiritual ignorance have to be dispelled by the radiance of Divine Knowledge, before the happy state to which all good men are looking forward shall have been reached at last! Is it not to help towards this consummation that 'Israel has been saved of the Lord with an everlasting salvation'? Shall he, whose creed more clearly than any other preaches the good tidings to mankind, he whose most sublime prophecies have had for their theme a Golden Age, in which, not he alone, but all humanity shall find peace and joy—he, the herald of the world's progress, moral and spiritual—shall he not see the day when the book is unsealed, when the vision is fulfilled, when God's abundant blessing shall sweep, like a fruitful flood, over all the earth? Has Israel been led thus far over the wastes of time only to die in the wilderness? Or is God's hand waxed short—that hand that never yet has faltered in its work, never yet failed in its power? A thousand times no. Faith, my brethren, faith in the vitality of our creed and our mission—this is what we especially need in these days.

For you will say, perhaps, that already the feet of humanity are firmly set on God's

highway, and no longer require any support from us—that the Jew has done his work by sowing the Divine seed in the bosom of mankind, and that the fruit will come of its own accord in God's good time. Do not think so. Religion is being purged, it is true, of superstition and error, and slowly and painfully the world is climbing to its moral regeneration. But the spiritual darkness that covers the earth is still thick enough to need the holy light that Judaism sheds, and our example may yet be helpful to many a brother in his toilsome ascent to perfection. Nor dare we rely on individual effort for the accomplishment of our sacred task. The very fact that we are preaching the truth, and living the noble life, as a race, as a people, the springs of whose nationality are seated in religion alone,—the fact that we are no mere collection of isolated believers, but still, as of old, a *kingdom* of priests and a *holy nation*,—this must intensify the eloquence of our testimony for God, and increase the force of our example a thousand-fold. Not, then, as stray units in the totality of humanity's workers, but as the army of the Lord, fighting in serried ranks for truth and righteousness, let us continue to live and strive. For only thus shall our mission be carried to its end; only thus shall the task for which Israel has been made God's elect, and preserved

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through the ages, be finally accomplished. Let us, then, glory in our title and our work. In all sincerity let us praise God for having 'chosen us from all nations, and for having given us His Law.'<sup>1</sup> But let us prove ourselves worthy of the distinction by showing that obedience, that fidelity to our creed, that self-sacrifice for Duty's sake, which alone can ensure the fulfilment of our world-wide task. May God give us wisdom to discern this our work, and endow us with the strength to do it ! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> See the Synagogue liturgy.

## JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

A SHORT time ago I happened to enter a church where they were baptizing an infant. The ceremony set me thinking about Christian doctrine and the points in which it differs from Judaism. Baptism has for its foundation the theory of Original Sin. Every human being, according to that theory, is tainted with the transgression of Adam and Eve, and from the consequences of that transgression the self-sacrifice of the Cross alone has power to save him. But to be thus saved, he must believe in the divinity of the Teacher who so sacrificed himself. In other words, he must be a conforming Christian ; he must be received into the bosom of the Church. Baptism is the visible symbol of that reception, and therefore it becomes the necessary instrument for the remission of sin. If it be objected that a new-born child 'with no language but a cry,' no instinct save that which draws him to his mother's breast, cannot believe, any more than he can disbelieve, the reply is that he can do it by proxy ; his godfather and godmother make a solemn profession of faith for him. The spirit of the rite is brought out

in sharp relief in a note appended to the Baptismal Service in the Book of Common Prayer: 'It is certain by God's word that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved.' From which it necessarily follows that children who have not committed actual sin, but who die without having been baptized, are not undoubtedly saved. 'The old Adam' may prove their undoing in the next world, though personally they are perfectly innocent; while those children who happen to have sponsors to make a declaration of belief on their behalf before they die will be 'inheritors of the everlasting kingdom.'

This is a fair specimen—it is almost an epitome—of the teaching of the Church, and I commend it to the serious consideration of those youthful members of our own communion who may be tempted to extol Christianity at the expense of Judaism. I know from cases that have come within my own personal experience that, now and then, Jews—or to be more accurate, Jewesses—of an impressionable age are caught by the glitter of the Church, and think, with a sigh, how beautiful it would be if the rites of the Synagogue were not characterised by so severe a simplicity. They are attracted by the Christian Service with its impressive ritual, its stirring and tuneful

hymns, or they are captivated by the winning character of the hero of the Gospels; and they reflect with regret that their own form of worship is aesthetically less satisfying, and the history of their religion less instinct with personal charm. Occasionally, regret manifests itself in action of a pronounced kind, and the homely religion is abjured for the more romantic one. How often disillusion follows on such cases it is impossible to say; for converts—unless they are of the professional class that apostatise for pay and therefore apostatise often—hide any dissatisfaction with their new creed jealously from the world, nay, hardly breathe the secret even to themselves. Be that as it may, it is well that young people of our race, who exclaim 'how superior!' when they think of the religion of their Christian schoolmates and companions, should be at the pains to examine it in its entirety before pronouncing judgment. A religion whose surface looks so beautiful may prove to be far less satisfactory when examination is extended to the core. Music and incense, even religious stories, however inspiring, do not make a religion. It is made by cardinal truths—truths to live by, and which, if one is to live by them, must be felt to be truths. If there are people, as doubtless there are, who can honestly believe in the dogma of Original Sin, of the

in sharp relief in a note appended to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Confession of Faith in the Book of Common Prayer. 'It is certain by God's word, that all they which are baptized, dying before they have committed actual sin, are undoubtedly saved; which it necessarily follows, that they which have not committed actual sin, dying before they have been baptized, are undoubtedly saved. 'The old men, dying before their undoing in the next world, though personally they are perfectly saved, yet those children who happen to make a declaration of belief before they die will be 'inheritors of the everlasting kingdom.'

This is a fair specimen—it is, indeed, the only specimen I have found in any English book—of the teaching of the Church of England on the subject. I commend it to the serious consideration of those youthful members of our Church who may be tempted to exchange the expense of Judaism for that of Christianity. I have seen, in my experience that, now and then, Jewish girls, though accurate, Jewesses—of an impulsive nature, are caught by the glitter of the world. I think, with a sigh, how beautiful it would be if the rites of the Synagogue were not terised by so severe a simplicity. I have been attracted by the Christian Church, by its impressive ritual, its stirring music, its

any other as its superior. As regards the inspiration which the Christian undoubtedly does draw from the contemplation of the virtues of his Master, I have already pointed out in a previous sermon<sup>1</sup> that the Jew is furnished with a similar incentive to nobility of life if he will only think of it. It is to be found in the heroism of Israel, in his fortitude under unique suffering, in his living for an idea, which, considering what life has meant for him, has been even more glorious than his dying for it. Such a spectacle has this advantage over the Gospel story, that the most destructive critic cannot deny that it is historically true. It has this further advantage that it is a *living* spectacle—one on which we are gazing with our own eyes. The patience with which the Jews in Russia to-day bear their sufferings—patience inspired by devotion to the faith—is the wonder and admiration of the most sober observers in the Christendom whose creed those sufferings disgrace.<sup>2</sup> For the Israelite, then, shall they not be a mighty force impelling to a like self-surrender for the religious idea?

But this by the way. Where Judaism gains is in the simplicity of its theological teaching. The few doctrines that can fairly be deduced from the language of the Hebrew Scriptures are such as a child can under-

<sup>1</sup> The sermon on 'The Ideal in Judaism.' <sup>2</sup> See Note I.

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stand. I say deduced, because the Bible does not directly enjoin belief, but conduct. It says, 'Do this,' not 'Believe this.' A certain amount of belief is necessarily assumed; we must assent, for example, to the proposition that God exists before we can be told to serve Him. But the Bible never formulates articles of faith; even the Rabbins, as a rule, shrank from formulating them. The more intrepid spirits who essayed the task found themselves at variance with each other, and the objects of hostility to many sections of Jewry. But their schemes of doctrine were put forward on their individual responsibility, never as the authoritative teaching of the Jewish Church. Many a synod has declared what is Jewish practice, but no council or conclave, with any pretensions to representative character, has ever attempted to state what is Jewish belief.

Here we have the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity. Dogma is ~~to~~ to the Church the very breath of life. It is the web and the woof of its system; to unravel a single thread is to endanger the whole fabric. Beyond the few simple postulates which are essential to allegiance to the religious idea and to belief in Israel as its custodian, the Jew is not bound to believe anything. Nor does a study of our ritual tend to refute this assertion. The Kabbala has now and again succeeded in

imparting a mystical flavour to Jewish ceremonial; but all that is authoritative, all that is Jewish, is the ceremonial, not the flavour. And as to the Prayer Book, one has only to think of the many phases of religious thought with which it has come into contact throughout its long life, the storms of wild speculation on the highest and holiest problems which it has weathered, in order to gauge aright the marvel that is presented by its comparative purity and simplicity.

All this is matter for sincere congratulation. In an age whose characteristic task is to simplify religion as the only alternative to seeing it perish, this doctrinal liberty becomes a very precious possession. We have no need to follow the prevailing fashion of casting off dogmatic fetters, for the excellent reason that for us such fetters do not exist. Modern thought has no terrors for the Jewish believer, because his creed in effect anticipated it centuries ago. Judaism has ever looked forward to this new intellectual era with hope, and now hails its advent with joy. Teaching, which avowedly was so framed as to be suitable for mankind only when the night of superstition should have yielded place to the dawn of enlightenment, is not likely to be put to shame, now that the day is breaking, and the shadows are fleeing away. Christianity

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won the adhesion of a pagan world two thousand years ago by swamping its Jewish elements with heathen mysticism. It purchased its popularity by debasing the doctrines of its Founder. To captivate the crowd implies exaggeration, a loss of simplicity, a loss of truth. There are those among our neighbours who are practically recognising the fact. An endeavour is being made to harmonise Christianity with modern ideas as the only chance of making it the Church of the future. What form does that endeavour take?—that of discarding those very doctrines the adoption of which made Christianity acceptable to heathendom and divorced it from Judaism. If the endeavour succeeds it will be found that a new atonement has been effected to rival that of the Cross, and that Christianity has sacrificed itself to save religion.

Whatever reconstruction Judaism is fated to undergo, we may be sure that the process will not be the equivalent of destruction, seeing that time cannot touch those few plain beliefs which constitute the essentials of the religion. Judaism, we may rejoice to think, has far more to say about human conduct than about theology; and human conduct, as Matthew Arnold has told us, is three-fourths of life. After all, whether its outcome be in collision or in agreement with the ideas of the age,

religious speculation does not make the slightest contribution to the stock of the world's happiness, nor does it appreciably increase the sum of human goodness. To know that God is, and that we owe to Him and to our fellow-men our best service, is enough—nay, it is everything; all the theology and the theosophy that has ever been invented to perplex and embroil the world cannot take us beyond this stage. On the contrary, it may divert into unprofitable channels energies that might have been devoted to that task of self-ennoblement and of bringing blessing to others which is the one mission of life. 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.'<sup>1</sup> This is the genius of Judaism in a few words. The Psalmist,<sup>2</sup> who declines to exercise himself in great matters or in things too wonderful for him, reflects it too. The ideal Jew does not busy himself with recondite problems. In the presence of the Divine mysteries he is dumb; he is as a little child on its mother's bosom. One only thought, one only desire, he has, and that is obedience. The effort after that self-subjugation suffices for all his energies. It is his goal, his hope, his life.

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy xxix. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm cxxxi. 1.

## THE SACRIFICIAL RITE

THE lessons from the Pentateuch appointed to be read in the synagogues on the next few Sabbaths<sup>1</sup> contain a large number of minute regulations relating to Sacrifices. The extent and elaborateness of this body of legislation sufficiently attest the importance of the place which the sacrificial rite occupied in the public worship of ancient Israel. That position it maintained until the final downfall of the Jewish State more than eighteen hundred years ago, when, with the destruction of the national sanctuary in Jerusalem, Sacrifices ceased. But despite that long interval, the interest still attaching to the old Mosaic rite is something more than merely antiquarian. The conservative Jew to this very day declines to regard the institution as dead. For him its vitality has not departed; it is merely dormant. In common with many other ordinances of the Law the sacrificial rite is in a state of suspended animation; but the Messiah will come one day and summon it back to active life. The general idea upon

Preached in March.

which this pious expectation is founded is worthy of the deepest respect and sympathy. The belief in the Return furnishes the modern Jew with an ideal—no mean service in these days of materialism—an ideal that lifts him out of his sordid self, and tinges his soul, however faintly, with the radiance of the sublime. As such, it is to be welcomed, honoured. Happy they who share it! shame upon them who would slay it with a sneer!

But while this ennobling belief claims all our homage, we are free to reject the particular garb in which some minds may have clothed it. The doctrine of the Return, like that of a future life, is variously interpreted by diverse minds. No two pictures of Heaven are identical; and the truth holds good of the Heaven upon earth which Israel is to enjoy when he comes by his own in God's good time. All these various visions of the future of our race are true, as regards their broad features; in their details they must necessarily be more or less false. To treat all these divergent interpretations of a splendid conception as literally exact is obviously impossible; we must make our choice. In short, we have to do what others have done already—draw our own picture, dream our own dreams. In filling in the outline which Faith has dimly sketched for us, we must choose the incidents

which correspond most closely with our own aspirations. No power, save each man's imperious yearnings, can fix the individual ideal ; the Kingdom of Heaven, it has been well said, is ever *within* the soul, not without it.

The pious Jew of to-day who looks forward into the future, and sees the old Temple Service restored in every detail, who beholds the victim stretched on the altar of Sacrifice, and its smoke ascending to Heaven as a sweet savour, is doubtless within his right. He gives the rein to his imagination, and his imagination is but the reflection of his spiritual state. He still worships the God of primitive Israel, still thinks that the Supreme can take pleasure in 'the blood of lambs' or 'the fat of fed beasts.' It would be useless—perhaps it would be wrong—to forbid him. But others, and we among them, are differently constituted. Our conception of God will not permit us to think that He, who is infinitely higher than the most exalted ideas that we can form of Him, can find delight in the burning Sacrifice, that He who lovingly provides for the wants of the meanest creature that breathes—He whom our conscience reveals to us as having willed that men should hold all life in veneration as one of the holiest of His mysteries—can desire the slaughter of sheep and oxen for His greater glory. We cannot

think so ; for our souls revolt at the thought. The God who loves Sacrifice is not He whom we worship, but the God of a far-off age—an age darkened by the shadows of idolatry. He is not, and never can be, our God. For it is impossible to believe that a rite which to-day seems too gross to be made a means of approaching the Almighty can ever lose its repulsiveness, ever become a fitting mode of doing honour to the Highest. The spiritual foothold we have attained can never be lost. The world cannot sink back into the abyss from which it has painfully raised itself through the centuries. The heights of sublime thought whence, through the clear air purged of earthly mists, the spirit sees God more clearly, are never abandoned for the valley below. Nay, they are but the steps to loftier peaks. As mankind grows older, it mounts ; the Divine panorama spread out before it becomes ampler, grander. In the highest sense is it true that 'the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.'

Go back to Sacrifice when the Golden Days have come ! The idea is its own refutation. For what does it mean ? It means that the climax of the world's progress is to be marked by a return to a barbarous worship. A rite, from the mere thought of which the best minds recoil with a shudder to-day is, in a

still nobler age, to be the chosen instrument for paying homage to the Supreme. Men are to advance in justice, in brotherly love, in wide-reaching pity for suffering, in the power of self-renunciation ; in this one thing only are they to go back, and turn God's House into reeking shambles. The notion, I say, stands self-condemned. It is condemned, not only by our souls, but by our common-sense. Nay, it is condemned by Judaism itself. For the great characteristic of our religion is its optimism, its invincible faith in human progress. The world, it teaches, is assuredly moving on step by step to the Messianic age ; pure religion will slowly spread among men, until the earth shall at last be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Who, then, is the true Jew ? he who believes in the revival of Sacrifices, or he who denies it ? He who dreams of all men casting aside their false beliefs and debasing rites, and worshipping God in purity and truth, or he who pictures them as taking up once more with the effete ceremonial of a semi-civilised world ? He who sees the smoke of the Sacrifice rising once more to smell sweet in heaven, or he who holds that the path back is for ever sealed to humanity, and that never will the soul attempt to approach its God by any road save the highest ?

How can the Jew who has drunk deep of the spirit of his religion hope for the restoration of Sacrifice, seeing that the hope is the very negation of his creed? It is self-contradictory for him to believe in a consummation, the possibility of which is excluded by the very idea of progress. He cannot consistently pray for it, for such a prayer would be a petition to God to reverse His beneficent plan; it would be an insult to the Divine Majesty.

But, it may be urged, what of the Bible? Sacrifice is plainly commanded, and what was pleasing to God once, may again be pleasing to Him. But surely the assumption springs from a false view of the function of worship. God does not need our adoration, much less does He desire us to express it in any particular form.<sup>1</sup> Communion with Him is the response, not to His need, but to ours, and the means we adopt for achieving that communion are necessarily of our choosing; they are human, not Divine, transitory, not fixed. In olden days Sacrifice inevitably occupied a large place in the Hebrew worship; for Sacrifice alone could satisfy existing needs. Even then the best minds saw in it only a temporary expedient, which would certainly and inevitably begin

<sup>1</sup> See Note II.

to fall into disuse on the day it lost its meaning, and ceased to be a spiritual force. This view of Sacrifice was held by the advanced thinkers of the Talmud,<sup>1</sup> and adopted by some of the greatest of later authorities, Maimonides and Abravanel among them.<sup>2</sup> And the attentive reader will find ample support for it in the language of the Bible itself. For what do the great Prophets and Psalmists mean when they insist upon the small value attaching to Sacrifice in the eyes of the Supreme? Why does the Psalmist cry, in words of wondrous suggestiveness, 'Sacrifice and offering Thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast Thou opened'?<sup>3</sup> Why does he declare that 'the Sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit,'<sup>4</sup> and that the Divine salvation is emphatically for him 'that ordereth his life aright'?<sup>5</sup> Nay, why does Jeremiah go as far as to deny that God has ever commanded Sacrifice?<sup>6</sup> Why? if it be not that, in the opinion of these great souls, the sacrificial rite was at best but a symbol, which would necessarily have to be discarded when it had outlived its purpose.

In fine, these clear-sighted men saw and taught that religion must grow if it is to live,

<sup>1</sup> See Note III.

<sup>2</sup> See Note IV.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm xl. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* li. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* l. 23..

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah vii. 22.

and that, as the necessary result of its growth, its manifestations must be for ever changing. The Sacrifice which, under the system of the Pentateuch, was the central constituent of Divine worship, formed in the prophetical age an entirely subsidiary element, which earnest prayer and, above all, true rectitude of life, far surpassed and might even supplant. To-day, after many centuries of religious progress, we have reached still higher altitudes. We could not even tolerate Sacrifices ; we shrink from them in repulsion. Religion has grown so much in that long interval that to re-clothe it in some of its old, narrow raiment, is not even to be thought of.

And so it is in regard, not only to Sacrifice, but to religious institutions generally. The observance which yesterday was living, because it drew its life's blood from union with the soul, may be already dead to-day, since there is no longer any contact with our spiritual needs to nourish it. To-morrow some of to-day's symbols, too, will have perished, and given place to more faithful exponents of our religious ideas. Those only are the true friends of Judaism who recognise this truth — nay, who see that Judaism lives at this present moment only because it has ever yielded a willing obedience to the law of change, and suffered its merely

outward shape to be determined by the shifting needs of successive ages. The finest minds among the Rabbins were distinguished by this insight. Jehudah the Saint once resolves on an innovation involving the relaxation of a Scriptural law. He is reproached by the more conservative Rabbins. 'What ! wouldst thou permit what thy fathers before thee have ever forbidden?' 'This is my answer,' replies the great sage: 'Moses made the brazen serpent; Hezekiah, because it had become an object of idolatry, broke it in pieces. There were kings before Hezekiah, who sternly suppressed idolatrous emblems, yet spared this serpent. How could he dare to destroy what they had preserved? Yet he did it, to his everlasting honour. So, shall I shrink from initiating religious changes that the age demands, merely because my fathers remained passive? No; I claim the very changes as my merit, as a token of my zeal for the true welfare of the faith.'<sup>1</sup>

The brazen serpent stands for every religious institution that has lost its old spiritual usefulness, and become a mere fetich. The sooner such outworn, misused elements are eliminated from religion, the better it will be for religion; and those who sweep them away, instead of being stoned as heretics,

<sup>1</sup> Chulin, 6a.

ought to be crowned as faithful and far-sighted leaders. 'There are times,' says the Talmud, 'when to break the Law is to establish it more firmly than ever;<sup>1</sup> and the Talmud itself has set many an example of this pious disobedience. Why not? For what is the object of religion but to make the higher life possible, to lead men nearer to God. And if, owing to the revolution that time has wrought in man himself, the ritual law no longer ministers to the spirit, but fetters it and chains it down, the breaking of the bonds becomes a duty. And who can doubt the magnitude of the gain which, in the case of Sacrifice, comes from this liberation? Bound no longer to consider it an essential of the Mosaic system, free to strike out the rite from our pictures of the future, able to think of God as the God of love, who delighteth not in the pain or the death of the humblest creature, and to depict men worshipping Him in the coming time with their prayers and their lives alone—this is a blessed freedom indeed. It is a freedom which rivets the yoke of our religion about our necks, and makes us glory more than ever in the name of Israel.

<sup>1</sup> *Menachoth, 99 b.*

## THE MOSAIC DIETARY LAWS

'Ye shall therefore make a distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, and between the unclean fowl and the clean. . . . And ye shall be holy unto Me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the peoples that ye should be Mine.—LEVIT. xx. 25, 26.

THE principal contents of the weekly section of the Pentateuch which was read in the synagogues this morning suggest the Mosaic dietary laws as an appropriate subject for this address. We must not assume that the primary object of those laws was the promotion of health. It is to be found rather in the maintenance of the superior holiness and the racial distinctness of Israel. The Pentateuch nowhere declares these prescriptions to be hygienic. The only explanation given is that contained in expressions similar to the text: 'Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the peoples, that ye should be Mine.' On the other hand, it cannot be a mere coincidence that the dietary laws of the Pentateuch, unlike those still obeyed by the Hindu or the

Parsee, which are of a purely religious character, are every day more clearly demonstrated by the results of scientific investigation to possess a high sanitary value. It is impossible to doubt that, whatever may have been the main object which these laws were intended to promote, some of them, at least, were enacted with the view of favourably influencing the health of the race. This, too, was an object to be attained, though a subsidiary one. The physical toughness of the Jewish people, its power of resisting certain maladies, its superior vitality, are scientifically demonstrable facts; and their explanation is to be sought for, among other circumstances, in the cumulative effects of an observance of the dietary laws continued through many centuries.

But the language of the Mosaic code is sufficiently explicit to show that the chief purpose of these prescriptions was a religious, rather than a sanitary one. Israel, as the text indicates clearly enough, was by their operation to be made holy, even as God is holy, and so to be kept a distinct race. Now, 'holiness' in the Pentateuch is a very comprehensive term. It implies the avoidance of every source of defilement, moral, intellectual, and even physical. It is the ground on which not only sensuality, but superstition too, is

forbidden, and on which is based a superficially commonplace command like that enjoining the hiding in the earth of camp-refuse.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious, then, that when we meet with the word 'holiness' in the Law, we are in the presence of ideas differing from those that are conventionally associated with the expression. The sanctity enjoined meant self-dedication to God, to match the Divine consecration of the race — the self-dedication befitting Israel in its character of a Kingdom of Priests. Thus, many acts, morally permissible, were to be considered forbidden, because they were unbecoming in God's elect.

For if we confine ourselves to the ordinary sense of the word Holiness, it is not easy to understand how abstinence from certain kinds of meat can sanctify a man, or how eating them can defile him. This was the difficulty of the early Christians, who declared that 'the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.'<sup>2</sup> But such protests against the confusion of merely ceremonial purity with moral and spiritual sanctity arose out of an imperfect sympathy with the genius of Mosaism. Obedience to the dietary regulations is never recommended as a substitute for righteousness and

<sup>1</sup> Levit. xix. 1 *seq.*; xx. 6, 7, 26; xxi. 5, 6; Deut. xxiii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Romans xiv. 17.

purity of heart, as every line of the Pentateuch testifies, nor as constituting sanctity in itself, but as a means of promoting holiness, personal, but racial more especially. Israel is God's people; he is therefore to avoid every act that can possibly clash with the idea of his consecration. Thus he was to keep aloof from every defiling thing, not the morally abominable merely, but even that which was only sentimentally repulsive—not only from the degrading sensuality of the heathen, but from those kinds of food which were either in themselves unclean, or which were declared to be so by the Law. In short, Israel was to show himself a people superior in every way to the surrounding nations. The very food he ate was to mark him out as a nation apart—to sustain his character as the chosen of God. The hygienic value of the dietary laws may have furnished a subsidiary reason for their enactment. But unless we are to ignore the language of passages like our text, we must conclude that the chief aim was to ensure at once the sanctity and the survival of Israel by assigning to him a range of duties both distinct from, and higher than those devolving upon men in general. The dietary prescriptions, indeed, are but one example among many of those specific ordinances which impose upon the Israelite responsibilities

from which the rest of humanity is free, and which just for that very reason—just because they tend to make him nobler than his neighbours—ought to secure his loyalty in every age.

And thus we approach the practical side of our subject. The dietary laws ought to be binding on the conscience of every Jew, liberal as well as conservative. And it follows from what I have said that the motive for obeying them ought to coincide with the motive which led to their enactment. It should be a religious motive. I cannot quarrel with that large number of my brethren who respect these laws solely because of their sanitary value. Better obedience of this sort than no obedience at all. But there is a vast difference between the self-restraint which is dictated by mere prudential considerations, and that which is imposed by reverence for a lofty ideal. The man who avoids alcoholic liquors because he fears the evil effects of drunkenness on his health or his worldly prospects, is a wise and, to some extent, a worthy man; but he is not to be compared for moral excellence with his neighbour who abstains because intemperance in his eyes would be a degradation of his manhood. It is so with the laws we are discussing. To obey them in a cold spirit of calculation, from a recognition of

the fact that submission pays, and that there is some profit in serving God, is preferable to rebelling against them ; but morally the underlying motive is not of a very respectable order. That obedience of this kind happens to be Jewish is a mere accident. It is clearly not rendered in the name of Judaism, but in the name of health. The deity worshipped is Hygieia—or shall we say Self?—not the Lord God of Israel. To base respect for these laws on such grounds is, moreover, a somewhat unsafe proceeding. For he who does so is necessarily blown about by every wind of hygienic doctrine, and it may happen that the food he holds to be prohibited to-day, he may to-morrow find permissible, owing to the removal of the medical ban. The opposite process has already taken place with rather startling results. It used to be the fashion to declare that the unclean animals of the Pentateuch were proscribed because their flesh was necessarily unwholesome in a warm climate like that of Palestine, but that the prohibition was devoid of force in more northern latitudes. Those who ate ham on the strength of this comfortable reasoning suddenly turned round one day, and became orthodox, when that terrible disease *trichinosis* was proved to be no respecter of geography.

Obedience to these laws may, if necessary,

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be fortified by the remembrance of their sanitary character; but it should rest on a higher and a surer foundation. Every Jew who makes the distinction between the clean beast and the unclean, which is enjoined by the text, should do so in the spirit of the text—with the desire to maintain the separateness of Israel, and to maintain it through Israel's superior holiness. And herein lies the answer to those who, following in the wake of the apostle of old, scoff to-day at a religion which lays so much stress on eating and drinking, and declare, in their turn, that 'not that which entereth into the mouth defileth a man.'<sup>1</sup> If Judaism were a string of unmeaning ritual observances, it would deserve the sneer. But, seeing that its regulations in regard to food are designed to achieve a high spiritual purpose, the objection falls to the ground. If our eating and drinking are not sufficiently worthy acts to be done in the name of religion, we must, in order to be logical, eliminate the unleavened bread from among the symbols of Passover. We have not arrived at that point yet; but there is no reason why the unleavened bread should be exempt from the critical objection which is making havoc of the dietary laws.

The truth is, that what entereth into the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xv. 11.

mouth *does* defile, if its entrance is due to a conscious breaking with religious duty. The separateness of Israel must be assured—the Kingdom of Priests must be preserved among the congregation of humanity—by observances that differentiate it sharply from the rest of the world. It is the same idea over again that keeps the high-caste Brahmin a personage distinct from his fellows; only in the case of the Jew the idea rests on the noblest basis. We would keep ourselves distinct, not because we have a contempt for our neighbours, or because we despise the world, but because such distinctiveness is the only means of ensuring the performance of our great mission. Far from contemning our fellow-men, it is the essential condition of the accomplishment of our Divinely-appointed task that we should love and respect them. Far from despising the world, we have to mingle with it in order to scatter the spiritual seed we have treasured up through the ages. Separatism is not necessarily isolation, and the Ghetto was not the Jew's handiwork. Our place is emphatically in the world; but the part we have to play there is that of Israelites, not, as an able writer<sup>1</sup> has aptly expressed it, that of 'religious cosmopolitans.' If Judaism is to perform its

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Henry Lucas in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* for April 1890.

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errand it must live, and to live it must be Judaism, not vague Theism. How it is to be anything else without these distinctive laws I know not, nor do I believe any one can tell me.

But, as I have hinted, the separation of Israel is not the sole object which these precepts are designed to accomplish. Moral purity is also their aim. For what does obedience to them involve but the best form of self-restraint—the restraint of the animal appetites? Looking at the whole body of Levitical legislation, and seeing how it evidently aimed at the regulation of sensual desires of all kinds, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that this was one of the objects of the dietary laws.<sup>1</sup> This ‘religion,’ then, ‘of pots and pans’ is a far nobler system than the superfine and convenient one which some of us are inclined to construct. I cannot but disapprove of the religious narrowness which makes many an untutored Jew see in his distinctions between *Kosher* and *Trifa* the very acme of spiritual effort. But he is at least entitled to the merit of suppressing his appetites from a sense of duty; and I leave it to you to decide whether he is not more to be respected than the Jew who eats what he likes with a fine impartiality, or even than the Jew

<sup>1</sup> See Note V.

who only does not eat what he likes because he fears for his health.

So long as self-conquest is noble, so long will these laws be worth preserving, and obedience to them be a mark of nobility. Is there not something spiritually attractive in the idea of the Jew of this age voluntarily submitting to restrictions on his appetites for the sake of duty—forming one of a religious guild, whose special characteristic is its self-control. The very difficulties in the way of such a subjugation of self make its accomplishment all the more honourable. The dietary laws are for this nineteenth century just because their spirit is directly antagonistic to the self-indulgent temper which is the mark of the age. It ought to be the pride of the modern Jew—and every child should be taught to feel it—that his religion demands from him a self-abnegation from which other religionists are absolved, that the price to be paid for the privilege of belonging to the hierarchy of Israel is continuous and conscious self-sacrifice. Yes, conscious self-sacrifice which involves all the pain of the inward struggle. The Rabbins have well said that the right temper of the observant Israelite is expressed, not in the words, 'I have no desire for forbidden food,' but in the words, 'I desire, but I will refrain.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Siphra on Levit. xx. 2.

The conquest of this specific longing is in itself a meritorious achievement. 'He,' say the Rabbins, 'who deliberately and forcibly restrains himself from sinning has already entered into the Kingdom of Heaven.'<sup>1</sup> Can we doubt that the obedience enjoined by the text has a general disciplinary value, and that the suppression of one set of unworthy longings suggests and aids the struggle with sensual desire generally? The power to perform one duty, the Mishnah reminds us,<sup>2</sup> begets the power to perform many; and it is so of obedience to these misunderstood and much maligned dietary laws. Respect for them tends to brace up the moral energies; it is a discipline which affects the entire character, and enables the Jew to battle successfully with self, whatever its promptings, to resist temptation, whatever its seductive form, to abase his desires, in Rabbinic language, before the will of his Father in Heaven.<sup>3</sup>

Those, then, who lightly esteem these old-world precepts are ill-advised, from the moral, as well as from the religious point of view. It is a spurious liberalism that would break with them. For to-day, despite the lapse of ages, the ideal of the text is living, glorious—worthy of all our loyalty, all our love. 'Ye shall be holy unto Me, for I the Lord am holy,

<sup>1</sup> Siphra on Levit. xx. 26. <sup>2</sup> Aboth, iv. 2. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 4.

## THE MOSAIC DIETARY LAWS 61

and I have separated you from the peoples  
that ye should be Mine.'

Let us write these words on our hearts;  
for they contain the whole philosophy of  
Judaism.

## ISRAEL'S WATCH-NIGHT

'It is a night of watching unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord, a night of watching for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.'—EXODUS xii. 42.

**A**MONG our neighbours the custom prevails of marking the advent of a new year with a solemn religious Service at midnight. The midnight bell peals forth its message to the congregation as they kneel in silent prayer. It is an impressive ceremony—this watching for the first footsteps of the coming guest, whose hands are filled with happiness and sorrow, with good and evil, with life and death—this lifting of the heart at so momentous a juncture to God in Heaven. But we Jews also have our watch-night, though we may hardly recognise it when it comes—a watch-night as full of stirring associations, as pregnant with spiritual possibilities. It is the night which ushers in the Passover. No special rite marks the advent of the other Festivals of the Jewish year. The Passover alone has its solemn prelude, which suffices to impart a tone of

sanctity to the entire Feast. It comes to find all Israel engaged in a worship that is unique. The scattered members of each household are reassembled, and it is amid their united thanksgivings and supplications to the God of their fathers that the Festival enters. Verily, in the words lisped by the youngest of that band of worshippers, it is a night 'distinguished from all other nights'—distinguished by the Service of prayer and song with which it is greeted, by the old-world observances which carry the celebrants back thousands of years, by the holy feeling which separates it from nearly all its companions in the Calendar, and consecrates it to God. And so, a watch-night it is, a night marked out as religion's own, a night to be passed with hearts open to catch every word, every tone, of its thrilling story.

Centuries ago this sacred character was assigned to it. Israel's great watch-night dates its origin from the very Deliverance it was to commemorate through all the coming years. Ah! with what a delicious impatience did Pharaoh's slaves await the midnight hour that was to be at once the knell of Egypt's tyranny and the joy-note that announced their own freedom! How anxiously did Israel listen for that sweetest of all sounds—'the voice of the Beloved leaping upon the mountains,' the

voice of the Bridegroom calling to His bride, 'Rise up, my love, and come away.'<sup>1</sup> Yes, for that night was a night of watching for a Higher than Israel. God Himself had singled it out as the time for fulfilling His ancient promise—singled it out, as the Rabbins tell us in hyperbolical language, from the days of Creation itself.<sup>2</sup> This was the night on which His holy arm was to be made bare, and His justice vindicated. Too long had unrighteousness flourished; but now it was to bite the dust. Too long had God seemed to slumber in His Heaven; but now He was to show that the cry of the oppressed had never failed to reach Him, for accumulated wrongs were to be redressed by a complete and unparalleled deliverance. It was for so signal a vindication of the Divine justice that this night was reserved. The text declares it: 'It is a night of watching unto the Lord, for bringing them out from the land of Egypt.' It was as though the Supreme had set His finger upon this night in the almanac of Heaven, and declared, 'This shall witness the long-deferred triumph of Right over Might; this shall tell for all time that I am the Lord, that I reign, and that righteousness and justice are the foundation of My throne, the principles on

<sup>1</sup> Canticles ii. 8, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Rosh Hashanah, 11 b.

which I govern My world. This night shall show to all coming generations that it is only the fool who says in his heart "There is no God," that the earthly despot who pursues his career of cruelty, thinking that he has only his victim's tears to reckon with, is deluding himself to his own ruin, that the unbeliever who cries, "Who is the Lord? I know him not,"<sup>1</sup> shall sooner or later find his ignorance rudely dispelled, his obstinacy utterly broken down, by the force of his own bitter experiences.'

And is this truth not worth treasuring in these latter days? Often does God seem to hide Himself, to have deserted earth and shut Himself up in heaven. The wicked, and not the righteous, flourish like the palm-tree, and grow like the cedar in Lebanon. It is the souls of the meek and the faithful from which humanity's tears are distilled, from which the painful chorus of a world's lament goes up, and seemingly goes up in vain.

But the lesson taught to Pharaoh and to Israel on that awful, that joyous night of deliverance, is still a living lesson; not one jot of its force is abated. God neither slumbers nor sleeps. He watches ever. Not one sigh passes unrecorded in the Heavenly volume; not one wrongful deed or impious thought but falls on fruitful-soil whence it will spring

Exodus v. 2.

E

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again, a harvest after its kind. That harvest may be delayed, but come it will ; and it must be gathered to the last sheaf. In taking sin into his life the sinner takes into it the germ of retribution—retribution none the less real because his eyes alone behold it. Read your own hearts, my friends, and you may, however dimly, recognise this truth ; and if you could read the hearts of your fellow-men—of those you meet day by day, wearing, it may be, a smile on their face, and treading the earth with light and jaunty step—you would recognise it more clearly still.

This, then, is the first lesson taught by our watch-night—the lesson of the sleepless justice of God, which brings home at last the sin to the guilty, and which remembers pitifully, lovingly, every suffering soul that sin has wronged. It is a lesson that cries out to us as men to abandon the folly which dreams that there is neither God nor law, and that there can be impunity for rebellion ; but it is a lesson, too, that comes to us as Jews with healing on its wings. For at this Passover-tide, when we would fain welcome the approaching Feast with meet sentiments of gladness, the spectre of Russian tyranny and all its attendant woe for our brethren, rises up and forbids our joy. Ah ! with what anguish will not the Russian Jew engage in rites that can

only be called festive in bitter irony ! For him the Seder-night this year comes in truth at a time of weary watching—of watching for justice, for God, ‘ more than they that look for the morning.’<sup>1</sup> Well may he conform to ancient usage, and greet the Passover in the shrouds of the dead ; for dead are his joys, his hopes, and there are dear ones torn from his arms by cruel tyranny, of whom he cannot but think with unutterable sadness at a time which has ever been one of re-union for Jewish hearts. But still the ancient, the eternal truth whispers to him and to us its consoling message. Not for ever shall this foul wrong go unheeded, unredressed. ‘ We may die in exile,’ cries a heroic woman, not of our race, doomed to end her days in the living death of Siberian torture, ‘ we may die in exile, and our children may die in exile, and our children’s children may die in exile, but something will come of it at last.’<sup>2</sup> The words have a prophetic ring. Something *will* come of it at last. The woe endured by the hated Jew, as well as by the dread revolutionary, will yield its fruit in its due season, when ‘ the iniquity of the Amorite shall be full.’<sup>3</sup> The God who ransomed Israel in olden days shall redeem him

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxxx. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Farewell words of Madame Breshkofskaya to Mr. George Kennan. See his *Siberia and the Exile System*, vol. ii. p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis xv. 16.

once again. A second time shall the Lord put forth His hand to recover the despised, the down-trodden remnant of His people.

And so we reach the second lesson of the text. The night that ushers in the Passover is a night of watching, not only for the Lord, but 'for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.' Three nights hence<sup>1</sup> we may watch in company with the Highest. God has marked out the coming Festival for us; let us mark it out for Him, devote it to His service, so use the modern Seder-night as to justify the ancient exclamation, 'This is that night of the Lord.' Ah! what a glorious message may it pour into our souls if we will but listen! This old Seder-service, with its seemingly antiquated symbols—how living it may be! dumb as it appears, how eloquent! For, reminding us by each emblem on our table, each line in our prayer-book, of the revelation of the Divine justice, not only in the days of Pharaoh or in the life of our people, but in the careers of all nations throughout the whole course of the world's history, it brings us face to face with God. It tells us that Religion's everlasting tale is true, echoed as it is in the life-story of the entire human race. It tells us that the fables and the myths are not in the minds of those

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the Sabbath before Passover, 5652-1892.

who believe in God, but in the minds of those who deny Him. But it emphasises this truth by fixing our gaze on the life of Israel. 'Behold him,' it cries, 'keeping this Passover after thousands of years, celebrating the old deliverance, preaching the old truths, living the old life. What does this phenomenon mean? What means this unchangeableness among so much that is changeable, if not a Divinely-appointed destiny and therefore a Divine hand to assign it?' Shall not our watch-night, then, bind us with stronger bonds than ever to God who has been our Shepherd all our life long even unto this day? Shall it not cast us down at His feet, and bid us sob forth our sorrow for our waywardness, our vow of renewed obedience, our promise of fealty to the old covenant?

My brethren, the Passover has ever been the Festival of Hope—hope taught by the memory of freedom that blessed our fathers after weary years of waiting—hope whispered by the spring-time that emancipates Nature from the long-continued thralldom of the winter. Let it teach that lesson to us above every other—teach us to hope in God, not to let the conviction of His rectitude, His mercy, slip from us—no, though our experiences shriek against the creed with a thousand voices. Let it teach us also to hope in the God of our fathers, to believe in His promise

which suffering has written with pen of fire on the heart of our race—the promise that Israel shall not perish, but that he shall stand up in his appointed place among the nations at the end of the days, in the Golden Age of universal peace and brotherhood. Throughout the long night of its agony—a watch-night indeed—our people cherished that hope; and shall we, now that the shadows are fleeing before the dawn, part with it? Three nights hence, following the old, beautiful custom, we shall fill the wine-cup for the expectant visitant, Elijah, the herald of the Messianic time. Let that be no unmeaning ceremony. In former days when protracted suffering might well have justified despair, our fathers still performed the act that spoke so eloquently of faith—faith in their own beautiful dreams and in God's promise—still laid for the guest that never came, and that seemed to have no thought of coming. But we live in happier times. We are the heirs to all the encouragement bequeathed by centuries of progress. Let us, then, hope; it is the one central lesson of Judaism, with its sublime optimism, its constant protest against the philosophy of our day, which regards humanity as the sport of evil forces, and life as bondage to a pitiless fate. Let us believe that, despite the evil within and

without him, man has the power to rise, that he *is* rising, that despite frequent stumbling the world is slowly climbing upwards. 'Blessed is he that waiteth,' cried the angelic voice to the dreaming Seer of old,<sup>1</sup> and blessed indeed are those of our day who, refusing to part with their healthful, life-giving faith in humanity, in God, watch and wait for the final deliverance of mankind from the servitude of sin and suffering—a deliverance which is to crown Israel with glory by vindicating his creed.

This is the message that is breathed into our souls by the initial Service of the Passover. Once with its fascinating tale of the Egyptian redemption it kept earnest Sages sleepless through the livelong night till the time of morning prayer.<sup>2</sup> May *our* watch-night come, and find us also with hearts awake—awake with wonder and gratitude for all the salvation of the past, but awake, too, with hope in a yet greater salvation, which, extending beyond the House of Israel, shall shed its blessing on all mankind. Ay, let its message carry us too in spirit, as it carried those old Rabbins, to the dawn—to the dawn of God's day, humanity's day, to the time of the *Shemang*, when the cry 'The Lord is our God, the Lord is One,' shall ring forth, not from our lips alone, but from the mouth of all flesh.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel xii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Haggadah for Passover.

## THE PENITENTIAL SEASON

'Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for He hath torn, and He will heal us ; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us ; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him.'—HOSEA vi. 1, 2.

**I**T is at a singularly appropriate season that we resume these Services. The Days of Penitence are exerting their solemn influence upon us, and now, if ever, our worship will be earnest, our efforts to find God will be blessed. Truly may we cry with the Psalmist, 'My prayer cometh unto Thee, O Lord, at an acceptable time ; O God, in Thine abundant mercy, answer me with Thy sure salvation.'<sup>1</sup> But to this we may fitly add yet another entreaty—an entreaty that the forces which are at this moment impelling us to approach the Divine footstool in prayer and submission may make themselves felt on every occasion when we assemble for worship, to lift not only our hearts but our lives nearer to Heaven.

'Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for He hath torn, and He will heal us ; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up.' Here is a

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lix. 13.

soul crying out in the hour of its direst need. It is a soul that has fallen away from duty, from God, to its own inevitable hurt. It has sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it hath profited nothing. Nay, affliction has overtaken it as the very consequence of its waywardness. It is racked by worldly sorrows, or perhaps it is writhing under the stinging lash of remorse. Whatever form the retribution may have taken, here is this soul yearning to go back to the God it has forsaken. It has tasted the pleasures of sin, and found them bitter; the tempting grapes have proved grapes of gall. There is no peace, no joy for this soul, save in the company of God. And so the culprit will return. His pangs do not deter him from the effort, though he knows they are the signs of the Divine displeasure. He is estranged from God, but he knows that the unfailing love of the All-Father will take him back. The hand that has dealt the wound will pour into it the soothing balm. God hath torn, but He will heal.

Surely, the text is a picture of our own spiritual condition at this moment. There are times in life, and this is one of them, when dissatisfaction with ourselves, with our ideals, our pursuits, our pleasures, is our one dominant feeling. We measure ourselves against the standard of goodness laid down by

conscience, and are appalled to find how miserably short we fall of it. It is as though a mirror were suddenly held before our lives, and we saw ourselves as we really are in one swift glance. The saddening vision may last but for an instant; one look, perhaps, and then the glass is snatched away. Alas, that the vision should be so transient; but, fleeting though it is, it at least fills us with a longing to be nobler, to put our days to higher uses, to diminish the gap between the ideal and the real, to abridge the space that sunders us here on earth from God in heaven. Sorrow for our shortcomings takes hold of us. We despise ourselves; we loathe our moral weakness, the frailty that makes us the sport of every gust of passion, that gives us as victims to every passing suggestion of self-interest. We hate ourselves for our degradation, for the shameful desire which drags us down, for our tame yielding to the solicitations of sin when we know that we possess the power of mastering it. And while thus we realise how low we have fallen, we think of God, and yearn to go back to Him, to find relief from our self-reproaches in His forgiveness, and to make the reconciliation the starting-point of a new life.

There are few of us, I think, who do not feel these flashes of self-recognition, these

waves of self-contempt, at some period in life. They come sometimes unexpected, unbidden, at those strange moments when a sudden soberness, a strange misgiving, steals over us in the very midst of our worldly preoccupations—proceeding we know not whence. A sense of the unfruitfulness of our life, the poverty of our aims, the thought that we are for ever pursuing shadows, fills and casts down our hearts. Or our self-dissatisfaction comes, perhaps, when we have left our artificial world behind us for a time, and we are face to face with nature. The silence and majesty of the everlasting hills, the broad ocean stretching far beyond our ken, the sad splendour of the sunset, the landscape bathed in the weird moonlight—these will stir within us vague yearnings for a life that is larger than our own, for the realisation of greater possibilities than we dream of in our worldly moments. Or this dissatisfied feeling comes at moments of crisis when some grave event in our personal experiences has profoundly moved us, when the fountains of the great deep within are broken up, and the windows of heaven are flung open. It is usually some overwhelming trouble that stirs us thus powerfully. Just as they say that a drowning man sees the whole of his life pass before him in one swift panorama, so our true self will stand revealed in the terrible moment

when calamity sweeps over us. Some heavy worldly loss it may be, or the break-up of health and strength which leaves us utterly helpless, or the passing hence of a beloved one, when we recognise with dismay and despair that the light has gone out of our life never to return—any of these disasters will suffice to bring home to us not only the uncertainty of our most precious possessions, but the need of shifting the whole centre of gravity of our life, of making a more resolute attempt to be at one with the Almighty. Like Jonah we come face to face in the storm with the God whose presence we have shunned, whose will we have lightly esteemed, and straightway we humble ourselves before Him, freely confessing our folly and our disobedience.

But see how benign is religion! It is a terrible thing to have to learn our moral state from calamity, to be brought to our knees in penitence by the anguish of self-contempt, to crawl back in shame to God, only when our idols have played us false. God would ensure us a happier fate. He offers us an opportunity of knowing the truth about ourselves, and of performing the practical duty which the knowledge irresistibly suggests, without suffering one pang save that of contrition. We need not wait for a crisis to come and extort the truth from us, as men were

once made to testify to the faith by being broken on the rack. No ; year after year this season returns, with its call to repentance, eloquent of a love, a pity, a sympathetic recognition of human needs, that is Divine. 'Return, ye erring children,' it cries in the name of the Most High, 'I will heal your waywardness. Let not your self-reproaches keep you back. My love is all-powerful ; it will receive you, it will comfort you. If you suffer because of the thought of your disobedience, you shall suffer no more.' Wise indeed are they who heed the sublime message, who, touched by its very mercifulness, hasten to lay the homage of their contrition before the Throne of Grace, who read, and judge, and reform their lives under the tranquil influences of these days, who discern their God in the still small voice of His loving appeal, and wait not till He is revealed by the mighty tempest of His rebuke.

For this solemn season responds to the cry that goes up ever and anon from every human soul, and which will ever be wrung from it as long as humanity endures. It is not only that we wish to live more nobly than we do ; we long to be assured that the very wish is to be trusted. We would be convinced that the mere idea of goodness is not a delusion, that in clinging to it amid the awful temptations of life we are fastening ourselves to a safe

anchorage. We would be certain that God is, and that He is on the side of right; and in the message of the season this imperious need of ours is satisfied. 'O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down,'<sup>1</sup> is the prophet's cry; and for us it is answered. Almost in spite of ourselves we come on these days face to face with the Highest. We are the same men and women that we were before this solemn period set in, and yet the crust of our selfishness, our materialism, is pierced by some mysterious force, and, behold, we are at God's feet, denying Him no longer, denying only ourselves. We do not debate the question in these days whether there is a God, whether religion is truth, nay, whether duty is a real voice, and not a mocking echo. We know it, we feel it. It is as though the sign we are always tacitly asking for amid the storm and stress of life were vouchsafed to us, and compelled our belief, our implicit trust. God lives, and to be true to our highest instincts is His law, our law—this is the good news that now is whispered to us, and the gates of our heart fly open of their own accord to receive it. Our ready acceptance of the revelation is the surest proof of its truth. The bondage of the world has only to be relaxed for a while, as it is at

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah lxiv. 1.

this season, the noise of the madding crowd has only to be shut out for a space, and the inner voices will make themselves heard, the eternal truths will assert themselves and conquer. It is the soul testifying to its great Author, proclaiming the verities which are part of itself, singing the songs it learnt in Heaven !

Our very acceptance of the message, I say, proves its truth. Let us make every allowance for the influence of custom, of an almost craven fear of some dread punishment which neglect of these days will involve, and still the response to the call of this penitential season is a witness to the veracity of religion. The whole current of a life is not to be stayed by fictions. Men do not forsake the world for the house of prayer, and yield themselves up to the sway of a higher law, even though it be but for a small fragment of the year, except in obedience to some overmastering need, some stern command from their inner selves which they dare not neglect.

Well, then, may we cherish these holy days —cherish them for the certainty they bring us of the truths which lie at the very foundation of the moral life—cherish them for the opportunity they give us for a more determined attempt to make that life ours. Ah, my brethren, what may not these

days do for us if we will only use them well! They may put into us a new heart and a new spirit. They may winnow the grain from the chaff, driving out many a failing from our characters as with the very breath of Heaven. They may lead us back to God, and, placing our hand in His, help us to walk with Him ever, as did the saints of old, to keep Him as our companion, the source of our strength and encouragement, for the rest of life. Familiar as these days are, they still mark a crisis, though a peaceful one, in our spiritual career. What we are to be for the whole of this new-born year—perhaps for the whole of the succeeding years, down to the day of our death and the solution of the dread mystery—hangs upon the use we make of this solemn time. For it is not in human nature to create for itself an opportunity such as this. Once gone it returns not, if it returns at all, until another year comes, and offers it to us again. In a higher than their literal sense the words of the liturgy are true. Our destiny—our spiritual destiny—is written down on New Year's Day, and sealed on the Day of Atonement. We write it down in the penitence with which we greet the dawn of the year; we seal it with the amendment which we solemnly vow on the great Fast of Kippur. The time for penitence is with us

still ; the Fast with its supreme task awaits us. Let us use both. To-day and to-morrow<sup>1</sup> let our endeavours to see ourselves as we really are, our sorrow for our shortcomings, the unrest of our unshiven souls, prepare us for the final act of atonement—atonement only to be achieved by a fixed determination to improve, from which no temptation, however powerful, however insidious, shall make us swerve. Then shall the concluding promise of the text be fulfilled for us in our turn: 'After two days God will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him.' The Day of Atonement shall lead us, with hearts bowed in submission, to the Divine feet; and God will bend from His high throne and lovingly lift us up, absolved, forgiven. Filled with His spirit—the spirit of faith and loving obedience—we shall begin to live at last, to live before Him, to live the true life which is inspired by the constant thought of His presence.

And do Thou, O merciful Father, stretch forth Thy supporting hand to us at this solemn time. Help us to draw near to Thee. Give us the power we so sorely lack to break with evil, ay, to see that we have done evil, and that there is aught in us that calls for

<sup>1</sup> Preached two days before the Fast of Atonement.

amendment. Help us in our weakness. If some faint resolve to do better, to stay our waste of the precious years, stirs in our hearts, do Thou make it strong. If a glimpse of Thee comes to us in our prayers, let it deepen into an abiding vision. O God, we throw ourselves utterly on Thy mercy. Think not, we beseech Thee, of what we ought to be ; take us as we are, with all our imperfections, all our rebellion, all our ingratitude, and fold us in Thy forgiving embrace. We do not ask to be saved from the consequences of our misdeeds ; we only ask for the assurance that we are restored to Thy love, that Thou dost not any longer deem us fallen, that Thy face is turned to us once more.

Father, do not cast us off. If one ray of sincerity lights up our soul, let it plead for us. If one fervent prayer trembles on our lips, take it as our atonement. Though it be our one angel among a thousand, let it be our ransom.

Bless us on the coming great day of the Lord. May it help us to find Thee ; and, having found Thee, may we never let Thee go ! May it be for us the beginning of a new life—a life led for Thee, for our fellow-men, for our true selves ! Amen,

## THE CRUSE THAT FAILED NOT

'The cruse of oil shall not fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.'—1 KINGS xvii. 14.

THE Rabbins<sup>1</sup> quote a well-known legend to account for the circumstance that the celebration of the Feast of Chanuah extends over eight days. It is said that when the victorious Maccabees re-entered the Temple, which had been profaned by the idolatrous rites of the Greek worship, they found only one small flask of consecrated oil, the seal of which remained intact. The quantity was sufficient to keep the lamp of the Sanctuary burning for one night only; but, a miracle being wrought, it lasted for eight nights, by which time arrangements were made for a continuous supply of holy oil. The perpetual lamp, thus re-lighted, justified its name, and continued thenceforth to burn without interruption.

The story has long since come to be regarded as a mere legend; it is not even alluded to in the old Chanuah prayer which

<sup>1</sup> Sabbath, 21 *b.*

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we have repeated this afternoon. We have learnt to seek for the origin of this eight-day celebration in less miraculous circumstances. When Judas Maccabæus and his pious followers dedicated the Temple anew, their thoughts must have instinctively turned to the consecration of Israel's first sanctuary, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. That ancient ceremony had extended over eight days, and in imitation of it, the rites which constituted the formal re-dedication of the Temple by the Maccabees were continued for the same period. This, doubtless, is the true explanation of a fact which the popular imagination, with its characteristic love for the supernatural, afterwards invented a miracle to account for. It is also possible that the story partly derived its shape from the chief thought which is suggested by the circumstances under which the Maccabees achieved their memorable triumph. That triumph was won by a handful of untrained peasants fighting against legions, strong both in numbers and in military experience. The revolt of the Jews against Greek oppression was more than a forlorn hope; it seemed the act of desperate men, who had no resource left them but a brave and an honourable death. The nationality of Israel, nay, the religion from which it drew its sustenance, was at the point of

destruction. And yet both were wondrously saved. The small remnant of the faithful were victorious, and resuscitated the religion and the commonwealth. The sacred flame that was so near to extinction, fed by the devoted hands of the warriors, and blessed by the Divine protection, continued to burn, and has burnt ever since. The little cruse of oil sufficed, not for one day, but for many days.

It is possible, I say, that this idea has helped to shape the ancient story. At any rate, we of this latter age may discern this meaning in it. Still regarding it as one of those legends which, as all history tells us, are wont to cluster in course of time about great personages and stirring episodes, we may, nevertheless, see in it a figurative suggestion of the triumph of Judaism in the Maccabæan age, and the promise of its repetition in the coming days. Those who still adhere to the old and good custom of kindling the Chanucah lights, are able, so to speak, to make the legend live in concrete form. Every night the lamps increase in number. At first there is but one feeble flame, whose precarious life may be suddenly terminated by a sharp movement of the air; but it multiplies into many flames at last, which give forth a powerful light, and one not easily

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quenched. And so, both the legend and the characteristic ceremony of the Feast bring vividly before the mind the true significance of the achievements wrought by the Maccabees. Taking their lives in their hands, they boldly threw themselves upon the redoubtable phalanx of the Greeks, and by their self-sacrificing valour gave new life to their people and their faith. That they saved Jewish independence for the two hundred years it was destined still to live, is certain. But no less certain is it that they saved *Judaism*—saved it, not for two or three centuries, but for all the centuries that have intervened between their day and ours. Upon this point let there be no doubt. Greek persecution and Jewish apostasy were combining their forces at that time to destroy Israel's religion in Judaea and in the East generally. Their success would have meant the total disappearance of Judaism from the world; for once cut off from the source of its inspiration, Palestine, the religion of the Jews of the West would soon have come to an end.

The Maccabees, then, saved their ancestral faith for their age; but they saved it, too, for each succeeding age. For never since their day has there been a crisis in its fortunes like that which they had to confront—no, not even when the Temple fell 200 years later, and brought down Jewish nationality with it. By

that time Judaism had made itself independent of Palestine and of Israel's political life. Above all, the labours of the early Rabbins had made the religion itself into an effective bond which sufficed to ensure the cohesion and the preservation of the race, whatever the disasters that might in future overtake it. By the time the Temple sank in the flames that crowning calamity had been prepared for, and its worst consequences averted. But the period of preparation, so necessary, so momentous, was only made possible by the exploits of the Maccabees. If their enthusiasm had been less fervent, their self-devotion less generous, or if they had failed, then Judaism would have perished forthwith, and there would have been no opportunity for the saving efforts of the Rabbins in after-days—nay, there would have been no Rabbins to make those efforts.

It is well that we should bear this truth in mind, for it supplies those of us with their justification who insist upon the importance of this Dedication Feast, and upon the necessity of securing for it increased stability in this age. True it is that the tale of splendid heroism which is associated with the Festival is in itself an all-sufficient reason for cherishing it. It is good—good for us, and especially for our children—to be reminded year after year that Israel can count among its great ones

men who displayed their devotion to their country and their God, sword in hand, and in front of a powerful foe. The martial deeds of the Maccabees are a welcome supplement to the life-long endurance of insult and cruelty, which plays so large a part in the mediæval story of our people. But the Feast of Chanucah not only makes these thrilling episodes live again, but forcibly brings home to us the dire peril with which the religion we love was menaced when the Maccabæan heroes were providentially raised up to be its salvation. We cannot but reverence the memory of men who preserved for us that treasure from which, if we are sincere Jews at all, we must own that we draw our sweetest comfort and our truest joy. And, therefore, we cannot but honour this Dedication Feast, which recalls the time when such signal services were performed for Judaism—nay, for us. We cannot but pray that this inspiring celebration may share the happy fate of the cruse of oil in the Biblical story and of the festive lights themselves, and, going from strength to strength, become an ever greater religious power among us as days roll on.

And so our thoughts are led from the distant past to the days that are to be. There are few of us, I think, who do not sometimes look forward and ask themselves what is to

be the future of Judaism. It is not an easy question to answer, and the reply will vary with the religious temper of him who asks it. Some will prefer to find the future mirrored in the present, and dream of the coming Judaism as but a copy of the Judaism that is. If a religion is to survive, they think, it must remain unaltered. Others take the directly opposite view. They cite the analogy of the physical world and the history of religion, both of which proclaim change to be the essential condition of all life, and then they picture to themselves a Judaism which shall find the source of its future strength in the fact that it is in unison with the new ideas that are slowly extending their sway over men's minds and lives. To whichever view we individually incline, we may at least be sure of this, that there is a future before Judaism. This is the assurance which is whispered by our legend and by our festive lamps to conservative and progressist alike. Judaism has safely emerged from its time of trial, from the cruel ordeal of persecution which seemed destined to destroy the feeble remnant of its life. The sacred flame, once so near to extinction, burns more brightly, more vigorously, than ever. Despite conflicting opinions about the nature and the destiny of their religion, which prevail among

the Jews themselves, it is firmly established in these latter days. Never, perhaps, has it numbered so many adherents, or taken a more commanding position among the religions of the world. Nay, Israel 'is seeing' at last 'of the travail of his soul,' and the truths he has suffered so terribly to defend are finding acceptance among the representatives of the very men who forced that grim defence upon him. Christendom is engaged at this moment in celebrating the birth of its religion—that religion which denies the unity of God, the central idea of Judaism. What agony has the Church not heaped upon the Jew because he refused to be false to this one cherished principle! And now see what a glorious revenge has been given to him. By slow steps this truth—this contemned, derided, persecuted truth—is making its way into Christianity itself, and as the mists of myth that cling about religion slowly disperse, the idea of the oneness of God shines out more brightly upon the minds of men. And so Israel is vindicated, and the truth for which he has suffered is receiving homage from the hands that persecuted him for it. It is, I say, a glorious revenge.

With confidence, then, may we look forward to the future. A religion that has survived deadly peril—a religion that is converting its

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persecutors, conquering its conquerors—is destined to live, not to die. It may have to undergo further development in the coming days, but it will not perish. It has still work to do—still a light to kindle in the world—and for that it will be preserved. ‘The cruse of oil shall not fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth’—until the bountiful rain of the knowledge of God shall fertilise the human heart, and the religion of Israel be mirrored in the religion of all mankind.

## ‘THE NEW YEAR FOR THE TREES’

‘He that keepeth thee slumbereth not.’—PSALM cxxi. 3.

**T**O-DAY is the fifteenth of the Hebrew month Shebat—a red-letter day in the Hebrew Calendar, where it is designated ‘The New Year for the Trees.’ It is one of the minor feasts of the year, and its advent is still marked by some slight changes in the Order of Public Prayer. Some years ago, as I can testify from my own pleasant recollections, it was made the occasion of a school-children’s half-holiday. The New Year for the Trees—it is a quaint title. What is its origin? The Law<sup>1</sup> exacted from the Israelite a tithe of his produce, and he was bound to render it year by year. With the object of facilitating the computation of the tithes due in respect of each year, the Rabbins fixed a date on which the year was deemed, for the purpose of the tithe, to have ended. In the case of the tithe of fruit-trees this date was the fifteenth of Shebat, and it was selected because for the Talmudic Sages it marked the termination of

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xiv. 22.

the winter or, at least, the severer part of it. With that day was supposed to come the end of the trees' long sleep. The sap began to rise once more, and the first feeble movement of a life took place, which was to manifest itself more vigorously later on in the bud and blossom of spring. It was, then, the end of the old year and the beginning of the new for the great world of vegetation.<sup>1</sup>

With the loss of Palestine, and the consequent decay of the institution of the Tithe, the New Year for the Trees lost its practical significance long ago; and yet its advent is still religiously noted in the Calendar, and welcomed by the Synagogue. Judaism does not willingly part with any of its old observances; it will not, without a struggle, relegate a traditional institution to that limbo of dead ceremonial whence there is no returning. And surely this is a right policy, so long as the observance thus preserved is capable of awakening some inspiring memory, of giving point to some useful truth. Perhaps, in this case, the poetic idea which underlies the cold legalism of the institution has captivated the mind, and ensured to this New Year for the Trees what little vitality it enjoys. At any rate, there is something that takes the fancy in a celebration which does honour to the

<sup>1</sup> Rosh Hashanah, 1 a, 14 a.

earliest signs of earth's re-awakening. Judaism in all its phases has ever kept in sympathetic touch with external Nature. In the mediaeval Ghetto—squalid, gloomy, miserable—outwardly prosaic in the highest degree—scant blossoms of poetry always lived to mock at their stern surroundings, like the flower told of in the story, which sprang up in a prison to gladden the poor captive's heart. The Jew had ever his bright dreams of national resurrection to make the dark night of oppression glorious; but the physical sordidness of his lot, too, was relieved at times by a gracious ceremonial which linked his spirit to Nature in joyous communion. Passover drew for him a picture of the splendour of the spring far transcending the reality on which he gazed with the eye of flesh. An ideal summer shed its glory upon him at Pentecost, the Day of the First Fruits. The rustic hut which he made his dwelling, the citron and the palm-branch with which he filled his hands on the Autumn Feast, led him back for all too brief a space into an idyllic life to which his race had been for centuries a stranger. These glimpses of an earthly Paradise made the three great Festivals, with their religious teachings, all the dearer, all the more gracious in his eyes. And so it was, perhaps, that he cherished this New Year for the Trees,

honouring it because it told him of the coming end of the long winter, because it bade him think of the time when the icy fetters that bound the earth should be unlocked, when the trees should bud and the flowers peep from the soil, and the stream go once more on its way singing, to match the liberated note of the bird.

To us, at least, this half-forgotten feast may tell such tidings. The turning-point in the winter is come, and Nature is entering on her New Year; her death-like trance is over, and faint signs proclaim the return of life. There is a nameless stir in the air; the kiss of the sun, just now so cold, has some passion in it; the grass raises its bowed head once more. Visions of spring gladden our hearts. Earth and sky are clothed by fancy in a robe of glory. We picture to ourselves the delights of the summer with its warm embrace, its invitation to the joys of the country-side. How different from our late experiences! How different from the piercing cold, the cheerless frost, the dreary monotony of the snow-scenes, which have been with us so long. But a day or two ago we could scarce look beyond the present. Now we can look forward, and hope. Warmth and light and joy have ceased to seem impossibilities. The half of a world is no longer to be cut off by

the cold, or killed by the subtle poison that lurks in the darkness.<sup>1</sup> There will come a time after all when the weak shall get strong again with the life-giving breath of the balmy air, when the suffering which winter has brought in its train shall be exorcised like an evil spirit by the summer's magic. The regular sequence of the seasons is not to be broken, though once it seemed as if the frost would never relax its iron grip. The old, old promise is still a living one, 'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'<sup>2</sup> God may seem to forget His covenant; but He remembers it ever. He that keepeth us, slumbereth not.

It is a truth worth gathering from the whispers of the season. This unbroken succession of night and day, of cold and heat, is but typical of Nature's working. Never does she disappoint us. Now she may seem to halt, and now again to march with unusual haste; but she goes by the appointed road, by the King's highway, not by devious, unsuspected paths. She does her tasks in orderly fashion, not erratically. She is bound in the bonds of rigid law, and cannot escape from

<sup>1</sup> Preached after an epidemic of influenza.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis viii, 22.

them. It is in this certainty of her operations that we discern the finger of God. Once it was thought that physical science, in revealing the mechanical character of natural phenomena, had given the death-blow to religion. In proclaiming the sovereignty of Law it seemed to have dethroned God. To-day we see more clearly, judge more justly. The more orderly the plan of the Universe, the more inexorable the statutes which control its working, the more certain becomes the wisdom of the Designer, the more evident the power of the Ruler. Every new link in the chain of testimony which proves Nature to be an unintelligent machine, acting with all the machine's precision, increases the need to postulate an intelligent Mind as an explanation of that precision. If only once this regularity were interrupted, then might we doubt God. If only once the winter ended not at its appointed time, but invaded and annexed the domain of the summer, if only once the night usurped the place of the day, the sea ceased its monotonous ebb and flow, then might we believe that the Universe, and with it man's life, is but the sport of chance. We know that this disorder can never occur, that the mechanism of Nature can never be so entirely thrown out of gear; but the knowledge is only the result of past experience. Because

there has always been regularity hitherto, there can never be irregularity henceforth. We trust in 'the covenant of day and night;'<sup>1</sup> surely then, if we are logical, we must believe in Him who has made it. 'Lift up your eyes on high and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking.'<sup>2</sup>

No; not one is lacking. The Prophet's insight bids him perceive the most eloquent sign of the Divine existence in the evident subjection of the forces of Nature to the will of a far higher Power. Like an army the orbs of heaven are marshalled at the Divine word; not one fails to answer to the roll-call; not one falls out of the ranks; all obey unquestioning the order of the Almighty Commander. My brethren, there is no need of miracles to tell us that God lives and reigns. The grand proof is not the departure from natural law, but its regular fulfilment. This globe of ours, silently pursuing its march in space, never pausing, never turning back, obedient ever to the law of its life—this is a sign and a wonder indeed—one that can never be surpassed.

Nor is this the whole message of the time. God is; but He is with us all. The Guardian

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah xxxiii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah xl. 26.

of each life, as well as the majestic Ruler of the Universe, He slumbereth not. He forgets nothing—neither the warmth that should come to thaw the ice of winter, nor the solace that should restore the heart nipped by the frost of sorrow. ‘Thus saith the Lord, If my covenant of day and night stand not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of Heaven and earth ; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob. . . . But I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them.’<sup>1</sup> The analogy is profoundly true. He who keeps His word in the operations of Nature will assuredly not break it to the individual soul. We trust in the promise that ‘while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease ;’ and never have we trusted in vain. And trusting God in this, shall we not trust Him in all ? He has made a covenant with each of us separately ; for He has bidden us hope. In the most bitter affliction the heart has the power to rise out of its wreck, to dream of the dawn of happier days. Is that dream always doomed to disappointment ? Has God, in teaching us to hope, deluded us with a phantom that laughs at the hands stretched forth to grasp it ? Does He beguile us like children with a plaything ? No, no. If we

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah xxxiii. 25, 26.

hope for surcease of sorrow, if we believe that comfort and compensation shall be ours, it must be because there is fulfilment somehow. There must be a reality to match the visions of it that delight our soul. What it is, and where, we know not. It may take a shape utterly different from that in which we picture it. It may be here ; it may be wholly reserved for the hereafter. But ours surely it will be. The deluge of grief is not always to overwhelm us ; the long winter must one day give place to the spring. 'God is not a man that He should lie. He hath spoken, and shall He not fulfil ? '<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Numbers xxiii. 19.

## THE TRUE LIFE

'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.'—DEUT. viii. 3.

**I**F you refer to the entire passage you will see that this beautiful truth appears to be presented in the form of a paradox. Moses, in his farewell address, reminds his people of their life in the wilderness during the forty years, now drawing to a close. Those years have been essentially a period of trial. 'God humbled thee,' the Lawgiver says to his flock, 'and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.' It seems a strange method of teaching this sublime truth. At first sight it would appear that if the manna taught one lesson more than another, it was the imperative need of bread. The cravings of the Israelites called for food, and God Himself had recognised the imperiousness of the need by raining bread from heaven

to satisfy it. But the apparent self-contradiction vanishes when we look at the matter a little more closely. What was this manna with which the people were fed? If their own complaints are to be trusted, it was eminently an unsatisfying bread. In their moments of unbelief they would rail at it as insipid and unsustaining; they would cry out for more attractive, more stimulating food; they would lust after the flesh-pots of Egypt. They ate the manna, and yet were hungry. Nay, they were not sure that even the manna would always be theirs. In the most literal sense they were living on the daily bounty of God. But that bounty might be, of a sudden, withheld. The bread fell from heaven every day; but one day heaven might be shut up, and the rain of bread cease. So, to the unsatisfying nature of the manna was added the uncertainty of its continuance. What more impressive means could have been chosen for teaching that there is something better than bread, something more needful for man, something upon which he may more worthily fix his thoughts and his desires, and in attaining which he finds the elements of his true life? For this bread that satisfied them not, let them substitute the spiritual food which never permits those that taste it to hunger—the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.

Let obedience to that word be their hearts' supreme desire; for 'by these things men live, and wholly therein is the life of the spirit.'<sup>1</sup> Nay, we may go a step further, and say that this food which fell mysteriously from heaven, and which vanished as mysteriously when the sun was hot—this food so delicate, so ethereal, was itself the very type of the heavenly bread, for which man has chiefly to long because it feeds his higher self, because it feeds his soul. As it lay on the face of the wilderness, born of the dew, the eye that saw it could not but trace in it the likeness of that Divine gift of Duty which refreshes life's desert, and makes its wastes beautiful.

And this is the lesson we too may learn; it is the lesson especially taught us at this Pentecost season,<sup>2</sup> with its memories that stretch back to the very beginnings of our religion; it is the supreme lesson of life. 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by all that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.' The words are familiar enough, and we all applaud their beauty. But while we cherish them in our hearts, we choose our way in life as though we had never heard them. If they were ever to become the world's motto, men would have to revolutionise

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xxxviii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Preached shortly before the Festival.

all their aims, all their ideals, all their modes of living. For now they are so living as though bread and all it stands for—the sustaining of the lower, the false self—were the one desirable thing; whereas then they would live only to nourish and develop their higher, their true selves. Now they are dominated by a base hunger—a hunger for riches, for luxury, for sensual joys—a hunger which they will often sacrifice their integrity to appease, and which nothing can still save the hand of death; whereas then there would be a universal famine, ‘not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’<sup>1</sup>—an unquenchable desire to measure human duty in all its height and breadth and depth, and to make life a faithful reflection of that larger knowledge. Now men are existing; whereas then they would live. Casting away their idols, ‘which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain,’<sup>2</sup> they would turn to God with one consent, and, turning to Him thus, draw nearer in unselfishness and loving-kindness to their fellow-men.

It will be a long time, I fear, before this ideal is reached. The thunders of Sinai were first heard thousands of years ago, but their echoes are still unspent. Duty has to cry with as loud a voice as of yore, for the world

<sup>1</sup> Amos viii, 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel xii, 21.

is still slumbering. Men go on living, yet missing their way in life all the while. Ah! that strange perversity of human nature, which prevents it from seeing what is for its own good! This very lower life for which men give up so much—their health, their peace of mind, oft-times their honour—it is just this which they rail against most. They reserve for it their most bitter denunciations. The weariness of life, the hollowness of its joys, the burdensomeness of the cares, the unrest, the fears, that are born of wealth itself—these are commonplaces, not on the lips of the preacher alone, but on the lips of those who have the best right to speak and to be heard, seeing that they have weighed the precious things of the world in the balance, hoping, believing, that they might prove real, only to find them utterly wanting. They have gone into their Promised Land, tasted of its fruits, gazed on its beauties, and yet, after all, have pronounced it barren from Dan to Beersheba. And yet the world goes on in the same way, as though these voices, so sadly eloquent, had never spoken. It heeds not the deliberate testimony of rulers, and of the so-called 'fortunates' who, seemingly possessed of everything that could make life happy, have yet declared that they have hardly known one happy day. It heeds not the hungry, dissatisfied look on

the faces of those who give themselves up wholly to self-indulgence. Nay, it is deaf to the solemn message that is spoken by the very brevity of life. It sees how the selfish man pays the debt of nature at last, and is torn from the possessions and the pleasures to which he clings so tenaciously. Yet it recks not of this ; nay, it is ready to furnish another recruit to fill the gap thus made in the ranks of the foolish. Every day the folly, the insanity, of attempting to live by bread alone is demonstrated before the eyes of men ; yet every day hundreds and thousands set forth with light hearts on the same mad quest.

Surely some of us will be wiser. The text summons us to exchange the false life for the true. It is a summons worth obeying ; for what it calls us to is the life that alone brings dignity to man, that alone brings him satisfaction. For where is dignity to be found ? Is it in the restless hunt after lower joys ? Or is it not rather in the unceasing effort to crush out every ignoble yearning from our breasts, to give full play to our higher instincts, to keep spotless and undefiled that glorious image of God in which we have been created ? Is it to be found in jostling and tripping up our fellows in the struggle for the world's prizes ? Or does it not lie rather in extending to all that are weak and sorrowful

a hand that helps and consoles—a hand like unto that of God Himself, filled with mercy and blessing? Nay, where is true happiness to be found? Is it in gaiety or dissipation? Does it consist in a big balance at one's banker's, in the ownership of broad acres, in the possession of a title? A man may have any or all of these, and yet be utterly miserable. He may have none of them, and be a fit object for a king's envy. No; true happiness is to be found but in one direction—in that of duty. It is possessed only by those who, whether they be rich or poor, have sweet peace in their hearts—peace that springs from a conscience at rest—by those who are ever striving to be true to the best that is in them, those who 'go' day after day, in the moral sense, 'from strength to strength,' those who are ever climbing slowly up to God, ever drawing nearer to

‘That perfect presence of His face  
Which we, for want of words, call Heaven.’

A platitude all this, you will say. I grant it. But the fault is in ourselves who, by persistently turning a deaf ear to the most solemn of all truths, have made its wearisome iteration so necessary.

Well, then, I ask, is not this happiness, this heaven on earth, worth striving after—this heaven on earth which no one can declare a

fable, seeing that every living soul can enjoy it, and so prove its reality? Yes, for the distinctive characteristic of this happiness is that it is inalienable; no power, no vicissitude can deprive us of it. The joy that springs from the thought of being near in noble aspiration to God, of being near in loving deeds to our fellow-men, is a joy which no trouble, no reverse of worldly fortune, can weaken. On the contrary, the darker the world grows about us, the brighter becomes the light shining in the heavens; the more hollow the desirable things of life are proved to be, the more welcome becomes the gladness of the soul that is at peace with itself. Sorrow, pain of body or of mind, even that most cruel of all miseries—the ingratitude of those we have trusted and loved—all are robbed of their worst sting by this inner, this invincible tranquillity. Not even the shortness of life can sadden us; for it is only the false life that is short. The true life is full, and therefore long; and the true life is ours. It is not a fleeting shadow, but the most glorious of realities. It is not a period of seventy short years, it is an eternity; for by its achievements infinite Heaven itself is won.

Ah! let us be wise, and make a more resolute effort to win this higher life. It is within the powers of every one of us. For

think not that it needs a saint to gain it. We have to perform no striking deed of self-abnegation; our duty is plain and simple and commonplace. The materials of the true life are about us, lining our worldly path, furnished by our daily work. To attain to it we have but to do common deeds nobly—so to bear ourselves in the prosaic struggle of the world as though we ever felt the eye of our Heavenly Master upon us, to take the humble clay of earth and fashion it into a vessel of divine beauty. Yes, remember this, I beseech you; for many a man and woman is deterred from entering the higher path because of its fancied impossibility. Nothing is demanded from us but what we can do. We are asked, not to realise the ideal, but only to put forth all the powers we have in the attempt to reach it. We are not asked to be the best; we are asked to be better. And that we can all be, however untutored, however insignificant, however small our moral capacities. 'It matters not,' say the Rabbins, 'whether a man achieve much or little, if only he fix his heart on his Father in heaven.'<sup>1</sup> We need not be saints, but we can all be men—true men filled with the sense of what is due to our manhood, and determined to acquit ourselves of the solemn debt. To do our daily work better,

<sup>1</sup> Berachoth 17 a; Menachoth 110 a.

more joyously, more honourably than ever, to purify our pleasures, to rob Self of more and more of its empire over our hearts—this is within the power of us all. This is life. This is joy that never fades.

## THE CHILDLIKE HEART

'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty ; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too wonderful for me. Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother ; my soul is with me like a weaned child. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.'—PSALM cxxxii.

THE conception common to most religions of the Divine Father has, for its correlative, the idea of the childlike man. If a loving sympathy is the tie that unites God to us, humility and faith are the links that should stretch from us up to God. If the Almighty pitieith us as a father pitieith his children,<sup>1</sup> it is in the spirit of children that we must think of Him and obey Him. The gracious relations so beautifully expressed in this simile of the Psalmist cannot be one-sided ; they must be mutual. The Divine love must come and find us with souls ready to receive it. The mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting must be greeted by a lowly and trusting spirit. Nay, unless that greeting be given, the mercy turns away as though repulsed ; it is as if it were not. For the story of the Divine love is

<sup>1</sup> Psalm ciii, 13.

not as a flaming advertisement that arrests the attention of every passing eye. The message is flung broadcast over this earthly life of ours, but written in language which only the sympathetic soul can read. God is with us in our sorrow; but only if we have the qualities needed to realise His presence. He bears our burden with us, but only if we have faith enough to cast it upon Him. He gives us strength with which to renew our struggle with the world, to renew the still more momentous struggle with ourselves, but only as the fruit of earnest prayer, spoken or silent; and for such prayer there is needed all the spiritual force at our command—all our faith and submission, all that power of self-abandonment which alone can lift us into the shadow of the Almighty. Only to such as have the heart of the child, lowly, trusting, submissive, is the fatherhood of God revealed.

It is this childlike spirit of which the Psalmist sings. 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too wonderful for me. Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; my soul is with me like a weaned child.' It is a wondrous cry of a great soul for the Divine approval—an approval which, by a wondrous paradox, it feels to have deserved by

reason of its very lowliness. Here is a poet with all the poet's keen insight, whose powers have sufficed only to make him humble. He has penetrated to the very heart of things—entered the innermost sanctuary of Nature and life, and come face to face with its mystery, only to realise his own nothingness side by side with the wisdom and majesty of the Eternal. There are things, he recognises, too wonderful even for him—truths which, with all his intellectual strength, he can never grasp, problems which, with all his wisdom, he can never solve. These he leaves with God; he will not exercise himself in such great matters; he cannot know, he will be content to trust. He will be like a little child that never questions the wisdom, never doubts the love of the mother on whose bosom it rests. Like that child his soul enjoys perfect peace; he has stilled and quieted it with a faith which hushes every murmur, soothes every pang, stifles every sob. His is the unutterable calm of the trusting, believing spirit—the spirit that has found God.

It is a captivating picture that is here drawn for us. I know nothing more beautiful in the whole range even of the Psalms. But is it an impossible picture? May we, too, not strive after the childlike heart—strive after it and win it?—the heart which recognises

the limits of its own powers, and confesses its knowledge to be ignorance in the presence of the Divine wisdom—the heart which, abasing itself in humble submission before the dimly-discerned throne of Heaven, is in its lowliness lifted far higher than those the world accounts exalted? Yes, for this spirit of faith and humility, so becoming in the children of God, is the one want of this our day. Faith and humility—they are rapidly becoming extinct virtues. Faith we have in abundance, but it is faith in ourselves—in the power of the purse, in our ability to hew our way to a competence with our own unaided strength through the tangled wilderness of the world, in the infallibility of our own judgments. Materialism is in the air, and its noxious germs infect our very being; we seem to have no power to escape the insidious poison. It is as though we were caught by a mighty current, and borne helplessly away from all spiritual anchorage. God is so far off in these days—far off, not because He is not ever near to us, but because we have put Him far away from our thoughts, our lives. Men go their way without Him, and for ever their strength is the arm of flesh, not the hand of the All-Father, that is eternally outstretched in mercy. Oh for a breath of a new life! Oh for one real glimpse of God—one flash of a Divine light to show

us our weakness, to make us understand how much cause we have to distrust ourselves—our theories and our ideals! Not that we ought to lose all confidence in our powers, but to realise their limitations, to know that with all our wisdom there is an infinitely greater Wisdom, with all our strength of purpose there is a Will incomparably mightier, to which we must dutifully subject ourselves—

‘A deep below the deep,  
And a height beyond the height ;  
Our hearing is not hearing,  
And our seeing is not sight.’

For it is quite possible to have this child-like spirit and yet to do our work in the world resolutely. The child, despite his constant feeling of dependence and submission, does his appointed tasks; only he does them with the thought of his father and mother in his heart. He does his work *for them*. So, we may rightly feel confidence in ourselves if only we subordinate the feeling to a larger trust in our Father in Heaven. We may range ourselves among the most energetic competitors in the world’s battle, if we will but remember that we are acting under orders, that we have to carry out, not our own plans, but those of our Divine Commander. Then we shall have self-confidence, but it will be of the chastened

sort that never degenerates into self-conceit—the self-confidence that is the true, the only right humility. ‘Arnolfo,’ Ruskin points out, ‘knows that he can build a good dome at Florence. Albert Dürer writes calmly to one who has found fault with his work, that it cannot be better done. Sir Isaac Newton knows that he has worked out a problem or two that would have puzzled any one else. Only they do not expect their fellow-men to fall down and worship them. They have a curious under-sense of powerlessness, feeling that the greatness is not *in* them, but *through* them.’ One is reminded of Kepler, the astronomer, who, on making his greatest discovery, cries ‘O God, I think again Thy thoughts after Thee!’ Nay, one is reminded of Joseph, summoned to interpret the dream of the great Pharaoh. His fame has brought him to the palace, and a king is hanging on his words. Pride may well stir his heart; but he puts the temptation from him. He has the power with which he is credited, but it is his only because it has come to him from Heaven. ‘It is not *in* me,’ he exclaims, ‘God will answer Pharaoh.’ He himself is but the instrument, but none the less an instrument that rejoices in its Divine use. Let Pharaoh tell him the dream; with God’s help he will interpret it.

This is the temper that becomes us all—the

true childlike temper, full of energy, even of daring, but ever on the alert for the restraining voice of the parent, sensitive to the recall of the far wiser mind. To me, as I sometimes pass through the busiest parts of the City at the busiest time of the day, there always seems something inexpressibly beautiful in the open door of the church, with its silent invitation to toiling men. It asks them to enter and devote a few moments to prayer and meditation—to prayer and meditation, whose chastening influence may be with them when they go back to their occupation, to sanctify and exalt it. No man, I am sure, does his work worse for responding to that invitation. No man is less diligent in his business because of the courage he draws from his humble sense of reliance upon God, for whom he toils, and who will help him in his work.

And this temper must show itself not only in the sphere of active life, but in the domain of thought. We must do our business in that lowly spirit which betokens a consciousness of God's presence, but our opinions, our creed, the principles which form the foundation of our life's conduct, must bear the impress of a like humility. The Delphic oracle declares Socrates the wisest man in Greece. The philosopher marvels at the saying, for he recognises that, like all other men, he knows

nothing. He discovers at last that this confession of his is the oracle's justification. He is the wisest because, unlike all other men, he perceives and admits his ignorance. The lesson is profoundly true. The wiser we are, the humbler we must become, for we recognise how small is our knowledge compared with the infinite Wisdom. Men extend the boundaries of science, only to find that there are no boundaries to it save those imposed by their own weak faculties, that what is called science is but a fragment of a science which has no limits, which only the mind of God Himself can compass. Men have increased the power of the telescope so that it has revealed to them myriads of new worlds, but worlds about which they must be content to know nothing. It is so throughout the whole circle of the sciences. The most brilliant achievements of the human mind only bring home to it more clearly how little it can accomplish. In the very moment of our elation the rebuke comes. It is only the ignorant whose empty minds can find room for pride; the wise are impelled to cast themselves down in utter humility before the universal Wisdom, to admit with our Psalmist that there are things too wonderful for them, mysteries which they yearn to solve, but which must for ever baffle them—

'But what am I?  
An infant crying in the night—  
An infant crying for the light—  
And with no language but a cry.'

Trust in God—this is what it all comes to. It is an old-fashioned lesson to teach, but it is the only practical lesson to learn even in these unspiritual days. For what else can we do but trust, and, like Job in the presence of the everlasting problems of life, the infinite power of God, place our hand upon our mouth, and bow without a murmur, without a doubt, before the fiat of the Almighty, when He answers us out of the whirlwind? What else can we do? We are in the grasp of a Power from whom there is no escape—a Power that wounds and yet wondrously heals, a stern Sovereign and yet a loving Father. What can we do in the presence of such a Being but trust Him—trust in His goodness, His pity, which His seeming anger only hides, not extinguishes—trust that in His scheme good is to overcome evil, and joy be the final fruit of pain? What can a child do who sees the face of his father, now bright with a smile, now clouded by a frown, but trust where he cannot understand, follow the promptings of his soul, and kiss the chastening hand, knowing that soon it will fondle him again, soon draw him once more into a loving embrace?

Let this frame of mind be ours now and always, keeping our thoughts sweet and wholesome, saving us from rebellion and despair, making us truly at one with God in mutual love. For only if we are possessed of such a trusting heart can we know the joys of the spirit—know what it is to commune with our Father, to hear His voice calling to us. To Samuel, the little child, the message comes which is withheld from the aged High Priest; he can catch the sublime undertones which the more pre-occupied mind misses. So, to us, if we but still and quiet our soul like a child on its mother's breast, the voice will call, promising love and pity and protection throughout these days of pilgrimage, and the message will fall like golden seed on our receptive hearts to yield many a flower for our life's garland.

## PESSIMISM

'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for Thou art with me : Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.'—PSALM xxiii. 4.

SOME years ago we heard, or rather read, a great deal about Pessimism. It was the fashionable creed. To hold that everything was for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds, was the correct thing, and if one did not believe it he had to believe that he did. No colours were too black in which to paint life. It was full of cruelty and misery, and death was the only blessing. Either there was no Divine Power in the Universe, or it was a power which, like the Car of Juggernaut, went its way, utterly indifferent to the myriads of lives it trampled under foot—a heartless power, a power that distinctly did not make for righteousness. There was 'neither God nor law,' or the devil was god, and Schopenhauer was his prophet.

Well, this fashion passed away too. Pessimism, like many another modern heresy, became stale, and was driven out of the magazines and public favour by some more novel cult. The tone of our periodical literature

has regained its normal health. Contemporary thought now reflects once more the natural hopefulness of the human mind, instead of being sicklied over with the pale cast of despair. But it would be wrong to infer that Pessimism is dead. What is known as Esoteric Buddhism still lingers on in certain secluded spots in the intellectual life of London—the curious flotsam and jetsam thrown up by the pessimistic wave of a decade ago—and, when it is true to itself, its ideal is extinction. But I have in my mind's eye Esoteric Buddhists of great enthusiasm, who, their creed notwithstanding, seek as indefatigably after the joys of this miserable life as though it were really worth living, and were not 'a vale of tears,' the very incarnation of everything that is evil.

But Pessimism is not the monopoly of this strange sect. Many a man with far less title to be considered eccentric is possessed of it, or by it, though it may not attain, in his case, to the dignity of a creed. Indeed at times most of us are pessimists. Things have only to go a little wrong in order to alter completely our philosophy of life, to change, as with the wand of a malevolent sprite, all our hopefulness into despondency, our firm belief in an overruling benevolence into a settled conviction either that God does not care what happens to us,

or that there is no God to care. We rise one morning with sunshine in our heart, and again and again we whisper to ourselves that life is beautiful, and God is good; but before the day is done some disaster comes, and we seek our rest, infidels, rebels—the night itself not half so dark as our souls. Fortunately, the gloom does not endure as a rule; Nature itself protests against it, and doubt and despair have to give way in their turn to trust and hope. Now, what it is important that we should see is, that even these temporary fits of despondency are unjustifiable, that misery is less eloquent of cruelty than it appears. Our sojourn in the valley of the shadow might be far less terrible if we could engrave certain wholesome truths on our consciousness, if we allowed God's rod and staff to be our comfort.

It would be idle to pretend that life is not full of enigmas that appear ever destined to defy solution. The world teems with examples of seeming cruelty which no theory can satisfactorily explain. If in such cases we 'trust the larger hope'—'trust that somehow good will be the final goal of ill'—it is in the temper of the poet who believed in 'love as Creation's final law'—

'Though nature, red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shrieked against his creed.'

Undeserved suffering is discernible in every stratum of the animal world, where one species lives only by preying upon the other, and in human life, where wholesale destruction often involves the righteous and the sinner in a common death. This familiar problem is as old as the Bible ; the Book of Job was written to propound it, though it has not really given us the solution. It is a riddle, indeed, to which neither Theology nor any other system of thought holds the key. But, on the other hand, it is well to be on our guard against exaggerating the proportions of the problem. The mystery of suffering is not so impenetrable as we sometimes think it. It is not all a hopeless puzzle, not all darkness and the shadow of death. Much undeserved suffering there seems to be, but it does not follow that it is aimless. Pain does not necessarily show a want of beneficence in God. On the contrary, all pain is unnatural ; it is a sign that some physical law has been broken. It testifies, then, to the love of Him who has made that law. Nay, is not pain a danger-signal, and therefore a blessing—a danger-signal which smites us with its intense light, but warns and saves us ? Does it not tell of disease which otherwise would remain undiscovered, to cause at last still greater agony, which could be ended only by death ? The

omnipresence of suffering fills us with despair, but our despair will vanish if we only remember that suffering is the very condition of life.

Of the anguish endured by the animal which some other beast pursues, the very salvation of its kind is born. The preservation of a species, so evolutionists assure us, has only been made possible by the need of outwitting its enemies, which the painful struggle for existence has brought home to it. The need has bred the ability to satisfy it. The fleetness of the gazelle helps her to escape from the lion; but she has only gained her swiftness through the sharp teaching of adversity. It is so with the very highest organisms. Man has only learnt because his wits have been sharpened by the hard grindstone of painful experience. He has progressed because he has suffered. The fight for life, with all its stress and turmoil, has made him what he is. His contest with the forces of Nature, with the earth he has subdued, with the brute over which he has had dominion, has raised him from savagery to civilisation. It has been the nursing-mother of science. His struggle for subsistence with his fellow-men has developed his energies to the utmost. It has been the progenitor of enterprise and all its splendid achievements. 'If there had been no danger to escape, no enemy to

conquer, no difficulty to surmount, there is reason to believe that man would have been a witless, stupid, soulless animal ; in fact, there could have been no such being as man at all.<sup>1</sup> Yes, pain is the condition of life. Without struggle the world could not go on. Human needs would be satisfied as soon as they were felt ; there would be no incentive to effort ; the energies of the race would die, and with them the race itself. To banish pain from the world would be to destroy the world.<sup>2</sup>

It is the same with sin, the twin-mystery with pain. Despite our progress, the sum of human degradation is still of terrible dimensions. But the great fact remains that there has been progress ; and it dispels half the difficulty. For how has society risen in the moral scale if not through repeated experience of the futility of sin, of the certainty of retribution, and finally through fear of sin itself, through a horror of the degradation of the evil-doer ? Righteousness has been evolved from transgression. From sin and suffering, as from the soil of the earth, have sprung moral sweetness and intellectual strength, humanity's fairest flowers. It is a paradox ; but think about it, and you will find it true.

If I am asked why it should be in the nature

<sup>1</sup> Moncure Conway : *Idols and Ideals*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> See Note VI.

of things that evil and suffering are the indispensable forerunners of goodness and progress, why God should seem cruel in order to be kind, I answer that I cannot tell. Nor does my inability to solve the difficulty give me any great concern. It is enough for me to find that what seemed to be chaos, proves to be order when the light of knowledge is turned upon it, that what in my ignorance I thought to be evidence that the world is swayed by a malignant power, or is the sport of blind chance, is in reality a testimony to the Divine love. Why, then, should I be discomfited because I cannot see further, because I can interpret in a way of which my heart approves, only some of God's doings? Is it a strange thing that the Infinite has problems that baffle the finite mind? Shall I not be content to argue from the known to the unknown, to think that the goodness which has been unexpectedly revealed in some parts of the Divine handiwork must be its living principle throughout? If I cannot see the orb of love in the distant sky, shall I not say that it is because of my limited vision, not because there is no such orb? Must God disclose all His credentials to men in order to be trusted? Are there not moments when we weak mortals may fittingly pay to the Divine scheme 'the homage of silence'?

For surely the theory of cruelty, designed or unintended, presents at least as many difficulties as the hypothesis of love as an explanation of life's phenomena. If it is hard to understand why an all-powerful God should be constrained to sow evil as the seed of good, it is still harder, in view of our commonest experiences, to believe in a demon-god, or even in a fate that feels nothing, neither hatred nor pity. Joy is a real thing ; how is its existence to be accounted for ? Why has it been ordained that the acts necessary to sustain and perpetuate life should be distinctly pleasurable ? Why should the elements of happiness have been scattered over the path of man at least as profusely as those of suffering ? Why should a landscape be beautiful, a source of delight ? Why should the lily have power to charm us with its pallor, with the grace of its form ? Why should the invigorating breath of the ocean fill us with exquisite delight, and make mere existence an unutterable joy ? Why ? if it be not that a God, a Father, and not soulless law, rules the Universe ? Where, then, is the fairness of the pessimist who, in order the more eloquently to preach his gospel of despair, deliberately shuts his ears to the thousand voices of hope that murmur about him ?

The truth is, that when we rail at life it is only because we have ceased to be reasonable.

We complain of the injustice of the Divine scheme, whereas it is we who are unjust. We allow the memory of our woes to colour our judgments, and forget altogether—ungratefully forget—the many blessings we enjoy. Because there is a cloud in the sky we ignore its general brightness, and declare that it is all black. Nay, very often the cloud is no cloud at all, but dust of our own raising, thick enough to hide the light. But for us it is a cloud, and we are angry with it accordingly. More than half of our troubles are our own handiwork, directly traceable to our folly, our wickedness ; and yet we lay them at the door of a malicious fate, as though it were the business of fate to work a miracle, and forcibly avert the natural consequences of human actions. Nay, many of our troubles are really no troubles at all ; they are artificial, imaginary. It would be absurd to deny that life has a sufficiency of very real sorrows, which have not been produced by those who endure them. But our every-day woes are made up of far less tragic materials. Too often we are like peevish children, and fret because we cannot have our toys, because we are denied pleasures on which we have set our hearts, because we have less luxury, less money than our neighbour, because our worldly schemes go wrong and his go right, because, as Carlyle puts it, we are

'not sufficiently honoured, nourished, soft-bedded, and lovingly cared for.' Is it not silly to blame fate for such trifles? Is it not unworthy of us to set such store by mere worldly gratification, to dignify it by the name of happiness? Is not happiness something higher, something real, something that is quite beyond the corroding power of mere worldly chance? Is it not the bliss of the man whose conscience is at rest, who knows that he has done his duty though the effort was supremely difficult?

Nay, there is something unmanly in this continual complaint about one's misfortunes—unmanly because it is, as a rule, unjust, because it is useless. The truly brave man will frankly admit that he is the author of much of his misery, and resolutely set himself to prevent its recurrence by strengthening the weak points in his character that have caused it. He will devote himself, moreover, to the task of fighting his griefs, whatever their origin; he will 'take up arms,' in the best sense of the expression, 'against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them.' This, and not vain repining, is heroism. Nay, it is religion. For it is to show a perfect faith in the rectitude of God, which not even the fiercest storms of disaster can ever shake. It is truly to lie down in green pastures, to be led by the still

waters, when life seems an arid waste, an unbroken succession of storms. It is to fear no evil, even in the valley of the shadow. This is religion—optimism if you like. But it is the optimism that makes 'the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change,' that supplies progress with its vital force, that makes life possible as well as worth living. It is the only true, because the only practical, philosophy. Despair is death; only while there is hope can there be life.

## THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

‘Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.’—ISAIAH liii. 4.

**T**HREE is a remarkable Talmudic legend<sup>1</sup> which tells how a certain Rabbi one day meets Elijah the Prophet, and asks him when Messiah will come. ‘Go,’ replies Elijah, ‘and ask Messiah himself. You will find him at the city gate; and by this token you will know him, that he sits among the poor and the sick. A man of sorrows himself, he ministers lovingly to those who suffer, and binds up their wounds.’ The Rabbi finds Messiah, and asks his question: ‘When wilt thou come, Master?’ ‘To-day,’ is the reply. Meeting Elijah again, the Rabbi cries, ‘Messiah has deceived me; he says he will come to-day, but he has not come.’ ‘Nay,’ answers Elijah, ‘he is no deceiver; in truth will he come to-day—yes, “to-day,” as the Psalmist says, “if ye will hearken unto God’s voice.”’

We shall lose the full meaning of the story if we do not see that, in speaking of the

<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin, 98 a.

Messiah, it is speaking not only of a man, but of men—not merely of a hero who is to establish the reign of universal peace by a sudden miracle, but of that general uplifting of the world which is one of the essential conditions of the Golden Age. Nay, every man may be a Messiah, helping to found the Kingdom of Heaven by his own righteousness and the righteousness which his example begets in others. And so, Messiah is always moving among us, in the shape of every noble self-sacrificing man and woman; and when these angels of light have driven out the dark spectres that haunt the earth, when sin shall have yielded its sceptre to goodness, then the glorious age will dawn. It may dawn to-day if only all men with one accord will hearken to God's voice.

Nor is all the significance of the legend unfolded yet. What is the mark of the Messianic man? It is suffering, and the sympathy which is the Divine child of suffering. Messiah sits outside the city 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife.' Spurning its delights, he dwells with the wretched, to whom, out of the fulness of his compassion, he brings healing. The life and rush of the world have no charms for him; he rejects all its enticing joys for the rags of the beggar and the wounds of the stricken. He suffers,

so that he may the better console ; he bows beneath the yoke, so that he may the more effectually redeem. It is a striking picture, and it is impossible to miss the truth it would teach. It is the truth taught in that kindred picture drawn for us by the Prophet, in a passage which is at once the despair and the admiration of the Biblical student. The hero of the fifty-third chapter of the Book of Isaiah is past finding out ; perhaps the portrait has no original more concrete than the nobility of the noblest souls that have at various times walked the earth. But the sublime moral of this obscure passage shines like a star in the night. The 'Servant of the Lord' must needs suffer ; for it is only by his suffering that he may reclaim a world. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, he is esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted ; to the dimmed gaze of men his affliction seems a punishment that is merited, or the cruel freak of a heartless fate. But the truth is otherwise. His sorrow is part of a Divine purpose, all-wise, all-good ; and with a divine self-surrender does he accept it. The evil that befalls him is no curse, for it is the seed of a world's blessing. His one agony may help to cure a hurt that is universal—nay, sinless, yet suffering, he may even atone for the sin of many, by leading them to God in a joyous

reconciliation. 'Wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.'

The lesson, then, is twofold: suffering is the lot of God's elect; it is the chosen instrument for the redemption of humanity. It is a lesson which we Jews may fearlessly identify with Judaism, despite the prominence given to it by another creed; for it is the lesson of Bible and Talmud, it is the lesson of life. One mystery is ever before us torturing us with its inscrutability. It is the mystery of pain—undeserved pain. Suffering is the birthmark of humanity. 'Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards;'<sup>1</sup> and, like every heirloom, it comes without reference to merits. The consecrated life is too often lived in the shadow of perpetual sorrow, while the life of riot that is lived far from the presence of God is illumined by joys that never seem to fade. This self-contradiction is the most distressing, the most importunate, of all life's problems. It is always with us; if we forget it for a moment, some fresh incident in our daily experiences rudely awakes our slumbering memory. Yet it is possible to raise a corner of the veil that screens the truth, though we may never wholly drag it aside.

<sup>1</sup> Job v. 7.

Our mistake is to think that sorrow necessarily means punishment, that when it lights on the noble soul it proves the injustice or the weakness or the indifference of God, or that there is no God. It may mean happiness, though not in the worldly, the conventional sense—the happiness that is real—the happiness of the stricken one whose perfection and peace it brings with it—the happiness of the many wrought from the individual agony.

For is there no such thing as the discipline of sorrow? Are there not exalted, self-sacrificing natures that have been made still nobler, still more unselfish, by the purifying influence of a great trouble—who have been purged of the last remnant of dross in the furnace of affliction? True, these natures are few, exceptional; for it is only the heart of gold that can endure the scorching heat, and emerge purified from the fierce ordeal. The weaker nature shrivels up, collapses. But to the strong how much is vouchsafed in suffering! The rude buffets of the blast serve, in their case, but to bring the flower of virtue to a fuller perfection, to endow it with a greater fragrance. They gain moral strength, sweetness, an indescribable tranquillity, a keener feeling for others who suffer, love for the unloved, helpfulness for the forlorn—all as the fruit of sorrow.

If,' say the Rabbins, 'thou desirest life, hope

for affliction.<sup>1</sup> It is well said. For pain alone can beget the spiritual insight that sees God clearly, the sympathy that reveals the lowest depth of human woe, the power of renunciation that enthrones duty as the heart's sole sovereign—and this only is life. The Psalmist has disclosed the truth: 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes.'<sup>2</sup> No; trial is not always the sign of God's anger; it may be, in Talmudic phrase, the 'chastisement of His love,' the seal that He sets on His chosen to show that they are His. They are the Messianic souls who are to do His work of mercy in the world; and suffering is at once the symbol of their election and the training that fits them for their task. It *pleaseth* the Lord to bruise them.<sup>3</sup>

And even we of lower stature may find something in the lesson to give us courage. We may not despair of God's rectitude or power because He seems to have but one coin, adversity, with which to repay our attempts to serve Him. For what is it that we have been expecting when, overcome by our troubles, we arraign the Divine goodness? Is it not bodily ease, worldly pleasures, money? And are these the prizes that would fitly reward

<sup>1</sup> Pesikta on Psalm xvi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm cxix. 71.—See Note VII.

<sup>3</sup> See Note VIII

the noble life? Is the man who heroically crushes every sordid inclination, to be repaid in gold—he who sacrifices comfort at the call of duty, to have luxury after all for his reward—he who lives for God to be recompensed with the joys of the world? Such a dispensation would be unnatural, unmeaning. For duty means self-denial; and once let it be inspired by self-love, by the hope of winning earthly prizes, and it ceases to be duty. Ease and work, the service of God and sordid delights—the two things cannot be companions; one is the negation of the other. ‘This is the way of the religious life,’ say the Rabbins, ‘thou shalt eat thy morsel of bread with salt, and drink water by measure, sleep on the earth, and live a life of sorrow. Do this, and thou shalt be happy.’<sup>1</sup> A life of sorrow, and yet a happy one! a sublime paradox indeed. One guerdon only can we win in this life by obeying God; it lies in the very obedience. Let that be the reward we desire, and the desire will be granted, for it will fulfil itself. Then no disappointment can be ours; for even though we suffer, we shall heed it not, knowing that if ease be not God’s pledge of love, so its denial is not the proof of His displeasure. When the prize is the soul’s peace, what matters it if body or mind be perturbed?

<sup>1</sup> Boraitha of R. Meir.

When our thoughts are fixed on God, what can the world do to us?

And this is the temper which has marked all the great ones of the earth since the birth of time. They have proved their nobility by a heroic disregard of themselves, by a contempt for their own pain, born of a reverence for the grandeur of their mission. For them all their woes have been dwarfed into utter insignificance by the majesty of their life's task. Adversity has been their spur, their strength, the material of their success—

‘To the spirit select there is no choice,  
He cannot say, This will I do, or that.

\* \* \* \* \*

A hand is stretched to him from out the dark,  
Which grasping without question, he is led  
Where there is work that he must do for God.

\* \* \* \* \*

Disappointment's dry and bitter root,  
Envy's harsh berries, and the choking pool  
Of the world's scorn, are the right mother-milk  
To the tough hearts that pioneer their kind.’

Nay, suffering has been their badge—the sign of the Messianic nature which lives from age to age. The Prophets have been stoned in every generation, and the world has waded to happiness through the blood of its martyrs. One man's death buying the life of the multitude

—the welfare of the race gained by individual self-sacrifice—the redemption of the world won by the anguish of the Chosen People—this is the everlasting ordinance, the legend written and rewritten above the history of mankind. The greatest benefactors of humanity have received only pain, contumely, death, as their recompence. But even those who have rendered less conspicuous service have still been martyrs.

‘Most wretched men are cradled into poetry by wrong ;  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song.’

The truth is wider than its setting. Suffering makes the poet ; but it likewise makes the true man. The Messiah in our legend sits among the afflicted, winning from his grief his quick sympathy, his power to comfort and to heal. So, out of the depths of their voluntarily imposed sorrow have the elect of the earth drawn blessing for mankind. Those who have died at the stake have helped to regenerate the world by the force of their splendid example ; but those, too, have redeemed it who have laboured through life patiently and silently to console the stricken, to uplift the fallen, to enlighten the ignorant.

Here is the martyrdom that is possible for us all even in this prosaic age. It lies in sitting

with the lowly and the suffering outside the city gates, in dwelling with the outcasts. It lies in the forgetfulness of self in one overwhelming desire to be a friend to the forsaken, to be a hope to the despairing, a solace to the sorrowing. Who will take this yoke upon himself—the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven? Who will serve God all his days by devoting all his days to the service of man? Who will voluntarily choose for himself the Messianic sorrow, the sorrow for others, the sorrow that bows down the heart to the afflicted and the sinner, the better to raise them near to a Heavenly joy, a Heavenly life? It is no light task. Yon rich man, wrapped in his cloak of selfishness, plays the easier part. He knows no pain, save that of self-pity. But let him go, with his gold and his joys, revelling in a life that is no life. You and I will choose the harder, the nobler path. We will do our share of the work of speeding the Golden Age, which will come to us by no waving of a magic wand, but slowly over the road painfully paved by the incessant toil, the fidelity to the best ideals, the self-sacrificing love, of each human soul.

## THE RAINBOW

'I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. . . . And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.'

—GENESIS ix. 13-15.

**T**HREE is no more striking illustration of the vast difference between the religion of the Bible and that of the ancient pagan world than is afforded by their respective explanations of the rainbow. A phenomenon so remarkable would naturally excite the wonder and the curiosity of primæval man. Its mystic beauty, the rarity of its appearance, the fact that it had the heavens for its scene, almost inevitably invested it with a supernatural significance. The old mythology, as we know, discerned a god in every wonder of Nature; and therefore it is not surprising to find that for the ancient Greeks the rainbow was the visible representative of a golden-winged maiden who attended the Lord and Mistress of Heaven, and carried their messages to mortals. According to one account, Iris is actually changed into the beautiful rainbow as

a reward for her services ; according to another, the rainbow is but the glittering ladder by which she descends from the sky to do her errands on earth. Now, contrast this myth, graceful, yet lacking the true religious spirit, with the interpretation of the rainbow given in Genesis. Here the phenomenon is made to tell a story of the Divine love for all the world—a story which breathes comfort into every heart that opens to receive its message.

The Deluge has done its grim work, and all the earth is a waste. It is with consternation and utter misgiving that Noah, on emerging from the ark, looks upon the silent scene. The Divine voice reassures him ; never again will this awful visitation light on the world. He may resume his toil in the certainty that it will no more be rendered vain by so destructive a scourge. The desolating rain is over and gone, and in the heavens the many-coloured bow is shining. That bright arch, in its splendour and in the time of its appearance, is a fitting symbol of God's consoling promise : 'I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. . . . And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.'

According to this conception, the rainbow

is not a goddess or the pathway of a goddess, but a pledge of the Divine mercy. It bears the tidings of God's love, not to one individual, but to the whole human race. It tells not of a reward given by the Heavenly Powers to a personal attendant, but of encouragement and solace vouchsafed from Heaven to every generation of those who toil and struggle and suffer in this world of trial. Alike in its exalted conception of the Divine nature, and in the breadth it assigns to the Divine sympathy, the Biblical interpretation of the rainbow is incomparably more sublime than that of the heathen mythology.<sup>1</sup>

But the full measure of the superiority is only realised when we try to extract from the two accounts some lesson that may be helpful to us in our life. What ennobling or sustaining truth does the pagan myth teach? I can find none. The rainbow is made to image a being as fair as itself, and like itself dwelling on high. And that is all. Turn to the Scriptural page, and the rainbow becomes the vehicle of an inspiring message. For the promise, of which it is the token, is not for an age, but for all time. The assurance that the destroying Deluge will not return, is whispered not merely to Noah, but to all his descendants,

<sup>1</sup> See Note IX.

to all the people of the earth wherever and whenever they may live.

Nay, in the widest sense is this true. The devastating waters, concerning which God has made with men His covenant of mercy, are the waters of sorrow. These, too, have their bounds set them by the Divine hand. To them the fiat goes forth: 'thus far and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' The torrent of affliction may swell and rise, and toss the heart on its heaving bosom; but God sits above the flood, enthroned for ever, and under His restraining hand it is suffered not to overflow, nor to deal utter ruin. This is the message of the rainbow—that smile set in the still frowning heavens. It is the message echoed by the Psalmist's confession: 'God hath chastened me very sore; but He hath not given me over unto death.'<sup>1</sup>

Is it not true? Are there not limits to the desolating power possessed by the troubles of life? We all have to suffer—some of us terribly. But does not a wondrous force uphold us in our affliction, and save our souls from going down to the pit? Troubles which, when we look at them from afar, we feel certain will crush us, find us, when they come, wondrously armed with the strength to bear

Psalm cxviii. 18.

K

them. We are like him of whom the poet sings, whose

‘ . . . resolve  
Upbore him, and firm faith ; and evermore  
Prayer from a living source within the will,  
And beating up thro’ all the bitter world,  
Like fountains of sweet water in the sea,  
Kept him a living soul.’

We hear of those upon whom there has fallen some sorrow which seems calculated to destroy all the worth of life. ‘ He will never be the same man, she will never be the same woman again’—so we exclaim. And yet, though the stricken ones reel under the blow, they do not fall, or if they fall, they rise again. Some secret well-spring within is opened, and pours forth its healing stream. After the lapse of many days the wound is healed ; and save for the dull, intermittent pain of memory, life is almost what it was. There is nearly the old zest ; and if the former joys have lost their power to please, others spring up and take their place. We speak of this magic force as the soothing influence of Time ; would it not be more just to call it the mercy of God ?

I do not say that there are no ruined lives, no broken hearts. But they are rare exceptions, and their limited number might have been smaller still, if recourse had been had to

the fountain of strength and salvation which God has placed in all the souls He has made. If the afflicted one has gone down in the waters, it is because he has not struggled with them.

And it is the power so to struggle which seems to me one of the most convincing proofs of the reality of the Divine mercy. I may not be able to explain the sadness which steals over life at times like the sombre tints that clothe vegetation in the autumn. I do not pretend to explain it. But how can I impeach the Divine goodness on its account when I remember that spring comes as often as autumn, that in the fabric of human experiences the golden threads are at least as numerous as the darker—nay, that with sorrow there is ever given the power of overcoming it, the power of recovery?

No life is utterly forlorn ; no soul, however storm-tossed, is utterly forsaken of God. The truth crept into the heart of Noah when, oppressed by the destruction wrought by the Flood, he raised his eyes and saw the rainbow lighting up the sky. And we of to-day may gather the comforting tidings literally from the same source. Quite recently I happened to pass through one of the most crowded parts of London, when of a sudden, a rainbow of wondrously intense colour and of unusually

perfect form became visible, and changed the whole prosaic scene. It was marvellous to see little knots of busy people, their eager movement arrested, their worldly preoccupations forgotten for the moment, standing in admiration before the gracious apparition. The rainbow lingered but for a brief space, and then slowly faded away. But it remained long enough to tinge with a Divine splendour the homely face of the city, to cheer many a heart with a vision of rare beauty, nay, to create the thought that God does not abandon any part of His world, or wholly sever the bonds of love that link Him to His human children. There is no life so gloomy, but some rays of comfort shall steal in to illumine it ; and though a whole city-full of rebellion and sin separate God from men as with a thick cloud, yet shall that barrier be pierced again and again by the sweet tokens of His mercy. This is the unchanging law, which shall endure when all else shall change—a law unchangeable as God Himself. ‘For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed ; but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.’<sup>1</sup>

And this covenant of peace is visible not merely in the strength that springs up within

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liv. 10.

each suffering heart, but in the loving deeds that may help to call it into being. It is not only the power given to you and me to rise out of the wreck of shattered hopes and joys, but the human hand that oftentimes is put forth to lift us up, which proves the ancient promise to be still a living one. It is a quaint idea of the Rabbins that in an age conspicuous for righteousness the rainbow is not visible ; the virtuous, they say, are a sufficient sign that God remembers His covenant.<sup>1</sup> And truly it is man's mercy to man that is the most eloquent witness of the Divine love. Every pang assuaged by human agency, every soothing, encouraging word that is spoken to still the complaining, to strengthen the despairing, spirit, every deed of true charity, every grasp of a friend's hand, every ray of light that falls upon our life from the soul of our beloved, is a manifestation of God's mercy. Those virtues of men and women, by the exercise of which they bless one another, are as truly God's angels as are the tranquillity and the strength that will sometimes mysteriously find their way into our disquieted hearts, coming we know not whence.

We are apt to forget this truth, to separate the beneficent activities of humanity from the other phenomena of life as something in which

<sup>1</sup> Kethuboth, 77 b ; Yalkut, § 61.

God has no part. We are even tempted to say that man is better than his Maker, and that it is only human goodness that saves the world from being altogether evil, life from being altogether a failure. But who has placed in our hands this power to bless, but He who has made us? Shall we deny to Him who has fashioned the human heart the authorship of the emotions—the pity and the love—that uplift it? Is man's nobility the one thing in a whole universe which owes not its origin to God? No; whenever we raise our thoughts in gratitude for Heaven's mercies, let us not forget to include among them the kindly deeds which help so largely to make life not only noble, but bearable. The rainbow is set in the heavens, but its ends touch the lowest parts of the earth—nay, it seems to rest on the earth, and to be built upon it as a foundation. And so the signs of God's love are chiefly to be discerned in human love, and the all-encompassing arch of the Divine mercy is reared upon the commonplace, yet ennobling deeds of kindness which men perform to one another in this earthly life.

It is a truth worth remembering; for it deepens our sense of the Divine goodness; it gives an added beauty to God's great scheme. Not in the splendour of external nature, not in the loveliness of earth and sea and sky, not

in the natural provision for the needs of every living thing both great and small—not in these alone are the footsteps of a loving God to be descried, but in every impulse that bids man help to lift the burden from the bowed shoulders of his brother, in every beat of the heart that throbs with sympathy for another's needs, another's woe. In olden days there comes to the Prophet a vision of the Divine glory, which he likens to the beauty of the rainbow. He falls on his face in adoration before this glimpse of a magnificence so sublime.<sup>1</sup> So, too, may we pay homage to the splendour of human goodness, that faint reflection of God's glory, that rainbow-like messenger of God's love. There is nothing so beautiful in all the world !

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel i. 28.

## ‘BE THOU A BLESSING.’

‘Be thou a blessing.’—GENESIS xii. 2.

THE words are a command as well as a promise. Abraham is offered the Divine love as the reward of a life lived for God; but from him, in turn, the gracious influences of human love are to stream forth, and fertilise a barren world. The two aspects of the meaning of the text are, in truth, identical. For the life that is blessed of the Lord must of necessity confer blessing on many other lives. Faith and obedience towards God, an overflowing sympathy for man—the conspicuous features of the Patriarch’s character—are a torch from which many a darkened soul may gather the light it so sorely needs. Every noble life has, in its nobility, not only the seeds of its own joy, but the promise of nobility and rejoicing for the hearts around it. It is an example that silently encourages weaker souls to be strong—strong in faith, in self-surrender—a fountain of loving-kindness where those who are weary

and faint through affliction may drink and be refreshed.

Thus it is, no doubt, that Abraham has come to be looked upon as a sort of apostle of truth and righteousness. Without any direct warranty from the text of Scripture, tradition, both Jewish and Mussulman, persists in representing his life's work as of a missionary character. He is the great iconoclast, breaking in pieces his father's images, bearding the idolatrous Nimrod himself on his throne, and boldly calling upon him to acknowledge the true God. But, more than this—and here the legends are more obviously inspired by the Bible story—Abraham is the personification of all the gentler virtues. He lays out, we are told, a beautiful garden, and near it builds a guest-house with four doors facing the four quarters of the heavens, so that it may be open to every wayfarer, from whatever direction he comes—a guest-house like the ideal temple of the modern poet—

. . . always open-doored  
To every breath from Heaven ; and Truth and  
Peace  
And Love and Justice came and dwelt therein.

The hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the sick lovingly tended. No one passes by without receiving what he needs. And for these

merciful offices Abraham will accept neither recompence nor thanks. 'Nay,' he says, 'give thanks not to me, but to the Master of the house, the most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth.'<sup>1</sup> And so, in the words of the Midrash, he brings near those who are far off, and leads them, in purity of belief and lowliness of spirit, to the feet of their Father in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

And to us also is the command addressed with its twofold duty. Religious ourselves, we may help to deepen the religion of those about us; possessed of a quick sympathy for human needs and sorrows, we may dispel some of the shadows that rest on other lives. We, in our turn, may direct some wandering soul to the real source of all its joys, to the true goal towards which it ought to press forward; we, too, may plant in this earthly wilderness a fair garden, whose golden fruit shall gladden and refresh those that pass by; we, too, may fling open the doors of our hearts on every side, and give rest and comfort to some of life's weary pilgrims, whoever they may be, and whatever may be their trouble. These are the two aspects of our command, and about each I would say a word in turn.

Upon every religious man and woman, as

<sup>1</sup> See Baring-Gould's *Legends of Old Testament Characters*, i, 215; *Tanchuma* on Gen. xv. 1. <sup>2</sup> *Yalkut*, § 64.

upon the Patriarch of old, the duty is laid of being God's missionary. They are to win souls for God, not necessarily by an aggressive propaganda, which too often repels rather than attracts, but simply by the quiet force of a beautiful example. But few of us are called upon literally to imitate the Patriarch's active warfare in the cause of religious truth. Every true believer, by the very strength of his unobtrusive belief, is a witness for Religion. He often does more to perpetuate and extend its reign than if he preached it at street-corners, or passionately appealed to each passer-by to save his soul. And his service becomes still more valuable when, as must happen in the case of every sincere believer, religion is the parent of righteousness, when faith in God is clearly the source of the virtues—the truth and the integrity, the gentleness and the purity—which mark the conduct of everyday life. The indifferent, the sceptic, the scoffer—what can plead with these half as forcibly as the spectacle of a heart ennobled by faith—a heart 'fixed,' like the Psalmist's, 'trusting in God' whatever may come, and gaining from its faith a sweetness and a power of renunciation to which the godless life seldom attains?

And this is a blessing we may all confer. Let us not think that it matters nothing to any one except ourselves what we believe, or how little

we believe. It matters much. Not one of us lives his life alone. A multitude of ties binds us to our kind. Whatever our circumstances, though our friends be few, though we may have no influence, though we may not be very learned, there is one gift we share with the most richly endowed and the most influential—it is the power of being an example, a possible inspiration. We may all, as we go our way,

' . . . leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time ;  
Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.'

But there are clearly two sides to this truth. For good or for evil our lives help, however slightly, however imperceptibly, to mould the lives of others. 'We have all a cure of souls. Every man is a centre of perpetual radiation, like a luminous body; he is, as it were, a beacon which entices a ship on the rocks if it does not guide it into port. Every man is a priest, even involuntarily; his conduct is an unspoken sermon, which is for ever preaching to others; but there are priests of Baal, of Moloch, and of all the false gods. . . . An evil example is a spiritual poison; it is the proclamation of a sacrilegious faith, of an

impure god.'<sup>1</sup> It is a terrible responsibility, and yet a glorious one. We are warned against being careless in religion—against half-beliefs, against the indolence which will not be at the pains of formulating a clear-cut, vigorous creed, or of leading a pronounced religious life—warned against it by the recollection of the injury which this indolence will assuredly inflict upon those about us by confirming them in their scepticism and their indifference to the solemnity of life. But, on the other hand, we are exhorted to make our religion a real, a living thing, by the thought of the blessing which our very example may confer upon those who are still denied the consolation and the strength which God has laid up for the hearts that trust in Him.

'Thou knowest not what argument  
Thy life to thy neighbour's creed has lent :  
All are needed by each one ;  
Nothing is fair or good alone.'

Nor is it only of those that are far off that we have to think, but of those, too, that are near. My brethren, there are little ones growing up about your knees, for whom you dearly long to secure the blessings of life. Foremost among those blessings set religion. It deserves the place of honour. But be careful that you your-

<sup>1</sup> *Amiel's Journal* (English edition), i. 43.

selves have the boon, or you cannot transmit it to your children. You are their conscience; they take from your lives the law which is to guide their own. If they are to grow up God-fearing, God-loving, the fear and the love of God must indispensably shine in your own conduct. You cannot be half-hearted in your belief, without denying them far more than half the blessings you would ensure them. You cannot be wholly on the side of God, without laying for them the foundations of a happiness for which in the after years they shall rise up and call you blessed.

But this, as I have pointed out, is only one side of the meaning of the text. Still more obvious are the blessings which we may diffuse around us by loving deeds. Here, again, the very example we offer is a blessing; for goodness is contagious, and every kindly act we perform is an eloquent voice calling upon others to imitate it. For is it not true that many a drowsy heart is awakened out of its lethargy, many a self-loving nature shamed out of its selfishness, by the spectacle of another's energy and devotion in the cause of humanity? How fruitful in blessing, then, are deeds of kindness! How eagerly ought we to seize upon every opportunity of performing them, seeing that their beneficent influences are so wide-spread! You may have known what it

is, when going on your way one dark night, to feel a welcome gleam of light suddenly flash upon you, to illumine your road and cheer your heart. You go on, guided and gladdened by those friendly rays, for some distance, and then you find that they have come from a solitary candle set in a window. Just as far does a simple deed of love travel, with its blessed effects. How many souls may it not light up with enthusiasm for the service of man! How much peace and strength may it not instil into the heart it is designed to bless! A word in season spoken to the despairing, a hand-grasp that tells some sorrowing one that he is not forlorn, a good woman's kiss that bids a weaker sister be strong and of good courage—how small are these things, and yet what may they not accomplish! They may become the turning-point of a life, and change it magically from a ruin into a fair fabric beautiful with hope.

And we can all be instruments for diffusing such blessing. We have not to search far for the opportunities. True, we must first do the duty that is nearest to us—first satisfy the demands of our home-life, with the call it makes to us every day and every hour to promote by our self-denial the happiness of those who are dear to us, with its appeal to us to forget ourselves in order that we may

the better remember them. But these common duties, which claim more consideration than we are always ready to give them, need not exhaust our energies. There are still wider possibilities of blessing that are given to us all to realise. There is the world with its troubled waves, whose tumult only dimly reaches our ears in our peaceful homes — the world with its fateful storms and its human wreckage. Shall we not put forth at least a little way on that tempestuous sea, seeking some perishing brother whom haply we may save? The task is not so difficult as it seems. Not great deeds are we asked to do, but little ones. There are many who long to be helpful, yet distrusting their own powers, or lacking guidance, sit with folded hands while thousands are going down in the raging waters before their very eyes. They carry blessing in their hearts and hands, but, because they do not perceive the treasure they possess, it is as if they had it not. Why should they not be enlightened? Why should all this fair flower of goodness, which might help in some degree to change the face of the world, be permitted to run uselessly to seed for lack of tending? Who will marshal these straggling forces burning with ardour for the good cause, and make them into a disciplined, well-led army, ready to contend with

human woe? 'Who shall begin the battle?' was the question asked of God in olden times, and swiftly the answer came: 'Thou.'<sup>1</sup> I should dearly like to see this much-needed movement initiated within our own ranks. I should like to see a band of workers associated with this congregation, who will pledge themselves to accept guidance as to the way in which they may turn benevolent, yet vague and barren aspirations, into practical and fruitful service.

Little or no money is needed; for the miseries that chiefly cry for alleviation are those that money is powerless to reach; what is needed is much helpfulness, much energy, much sympathy, much love. A Personal Service Guild, similar in principle, though not necessarily in details, to those established in some Jewish congregations in the United States—that is what I am suggesting—one whose members would take the work most congenial to them, and be ever ready to do it at the word of command. If the bread-winner of a family is without employment, swift feet would hasten to seek for it; if there is a sick person to be comforted, a neglected mind to be instructed, a solitary soul to be blessed with companionship, gentle hands would be outstretched to proffer the needed boon; if

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xx. 14.

there is a downcast spirit to be upraised with a cheering word, there would be lips ready to speak it. So easily would such work fall within the powers of the meanest, that even children might take part in it. They might begin their apprenticeship to the work of love by undertaking, for example, to be kind to animals, and to persuade their companions to show a like consideration.<sup>1</sup>

I would only remind you, finally, of what I have often ventured to tell you. The true value of our Sabbath meetings for Prayer is not to be measured by the passing fervour which they kindle in the worshipper, but by the ennobling effect they exert upon his life. If, as the result of our worship, our characters are strengthened, and our aims exalted, then indeed has it achieved its purpose. And never can its success be more signally demonstrated than when it inspires us to acts of self-sacrifice for the happiness of others, when it leads us to the dark places of the earth where pain and sorrow hold their sway, there to obey the command, 'Be thou a blessing!'

<sup>1</sup> The Hampstead Personal Service Guild was established as the result of this appeal.

## WOMAN'S INFLUENCE

'And Jezebel, his wife, said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.'—1 KINGS xxi. 7.

*I* WILL give thee the vineyard'—there speaks the masterful woman, the woman who is stronger than the man, and, alas, stronger for evil. Jezebel has been the type of female wickedness through the ages; but especially is she the type of the wickedness which irrevocably ruins the morally weak, and, while they are hesitating on the brink of sin, gives the fatal impulse that hurls them into the abyss. Ahab, the king, despite his magnificence, his many cities, his famous palace of ivory, is a miserable man; for he has set his heart on one poor vineyard, and cannot have it. Naboth, its possessor, will not sell his patrimony. In utter wretchedness this pitiable king takes to his bed, turns his face to the wall, and refuses food—the very type of the man whom insidious temptation finds an easy victim. His wife enters, and learns the cause of his sadness—learns it to

scoff at him. He, the Sovereign, to be cheated of his heart's desire by a man's obstinate scruples! Those scruples—nay, the man himself—are impediments he may sweep away with a wave of his hand. How ridiculous to grieve because this vineyard has been denied him! The denial only points out the way of getting the coveted prize. But Ahab is clearly not of the stuff of which murderers are made. Jezebel is cast in a different mould. She will take the necessary steps. '*Arise, and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard.*' She is true to her word, but at what a cost! She gives him the vineyard, but takes from him for ever his peace of mind. This one crime, in which he has suffered himself to be the passive accomplice, pursues him all his life. Nay, it is with him after death. It ruins his career; it gives his blood to be licked by the dogs. This fatal ascendancy of an unscrupulous woman is his total undoing. Grimly true are the words of the historian: '*There was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up.*'

*There* was the source of all the sin and the suffering: the power of the wife over the husband, exercised for evil—the degradation of a weak man into a bad man by a woman's

hands. One is irresistibly reminded of the kindred tragedy limned by the greatest of English dramatists. But for his wife's promptings Macbeth might have been innocent of overt crime to the end. Hardened warrior though he is, his mental fibre is weaker than hers, or let us say his conscience is stronger. She, with her 'undaunted mettle,' is the one spur that pricks the side of his intent, and moves him to the horrible deed which is to give him what she calls 'the ornament of life.' The ornament of life! The whole blood-curdling story reveals the cruel irony of the words. Like Naboth's vineyard, the crown on Macbeth's head, far from being the ornament, becomes the hideous blemish, the very curse of life.

But more terribly pathetic even than the misery wrought in both cases is the spectacle of the evil genius taking the feminine form. The corruption of the man is sad enough ; but that the corrupting influence should proceed from her who should and might have ennobled him, that he should be made cruel by the incitements of one whom Nature has marked out as the gentler, the more merciful, the more loving—this is pitiful, heart-breaking. She who, by all the laws of her being, is destined to be an angel leading the man Heavenward, becomes a very devil, whispering

to him thoughts of crime, giving him hands to perpetrate it, dragging his halting feet down the fatal stairway of perdition.

The picture is no isolated one. From Eve herself downwards the story of human degradation is too often the story of feminine influence employed for sinister ends. The sin in Eden is typical. The fruit which the man regards as forbidden he devours at the instigation of the temptress. But happily the converse is also true. Capable of luring men to moral ruin, woman possesses the strength that may lift them to an almost illimitable ennoblement. Delilah is matched by Deborah, Jezebel by Abigail, Cleopatra the notorious by Cornelia the illustrious, the mother and inspirer of Rome's heroes. And yet there are women who complain that they have no power, that they are defrauded of their right to sovereignty by a universal Salic law! They forget that rule often belongs less to the hands that actually hold the sceptre than to the power behind the throne, that the mind which inspires actions, whether they be done in public or private, is far more truly their author than the agent that actually performs them.

And this is woman's part—the part for which Nature has clearly destined her. Unsuited for the rough work of the world, ill-adapted to battle with men for supremacy in

the political field, she yet wields immeasurable power in the quiet influence she exerts over her husband and her sons. She may have no hand in directly shaping the fortunes of a nation or a community; but indirectly she powerfully helps to mould them, for she is the builder-up of character in those about her; and character it is that makes the individual and therefore the people. 'Woman's kingdom' is a familiar term; but who shall fix its limits? It is not the home only; it is the whole world. It is the mind and the heart of man, where lie the springs of the world's destiny. 'What,' asks Emerson, 'is civilisation?' and he answers, 'The power of good women.' It is a splendid prerogative; what can surpass it? Why, then, should a woman repine because the doors of Parliaments are closed against her, because convention will not allow her to enter the noisy arena of public life? She has empire enough to satisfy the greediest ambition—real empire, not the semblance of it. Let her not talk of women's rights, for those are not rights which have to be won by wrong; and it is a wrong to drive men out of their own sphere, nay, to deface the feminine character, gentle, placid, equable—passionless save for noble enthusiasms—with the dust of political warfare. No; woman must look elsewhere for her vocation. Her

sphere is that of lofty suggestion. Nobly aspiring, she must imbue man with her ideals, and act through him.

Listen to this story. In the time of St. Philip Neri, there was a nun who gave out one day that she had miraculously received the gift of prophecy. The Pope was at a loss to know how to regard her pretensions. While he was deliberating, Philip, who had just come from a journey, arrived, and learnt the Pontiff's perplexity. Promising to solve the difficulty, he at once remounted his mule, and rode to the convent. When the nun came to him, he simply asked her to draw off his mud-stained riding-boots. She refused to perform so menial an office. Whereupon, hastening back to the Pope, Philip exclaimed: 'Be not disquieted, Holy Father; here is no inspiration, for here is no humility.'<sup>1</sup>

We may attach this moral to the story: that the real woman—she who most truly fulfils the function of womanhood—is she who, refusing to assert her claim to a realm which is not hers, refusing to usurp a position in which she must boldly challenge the world's gaze, is content to find her work in more quiet and apparently humbler paths. Secluded though they are, those paths are glorious. For what can be nobler than to be the conscience of a

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Emerson in his essay on 'Worship.'

child—a voice of alternate reproof and encouragement—to be the inspirer of a husband, to win him for duty when self-interest claims him? Who can be stronger than the 'strong woman,' of whom the wise man speaks, whose strength finds its most eloquent witnesses in the fame of her husband, who 'sitteth among the elders of the land,' in the reverence of her children, who 'rise up and call her blessed'?<sup>1</sup> To a disciple, who has been disparaging the sex, a Rabbi replies, 'It is enough that they train their little ones, and save us, their husbands, from sin.'<sup>2</sup> Enough indeed; for to guide two generations in the way of life is a splendid task—one whose importance, whose solemnity, cannot be exaggerated.

Ah, my sisters, see to it that your efforts are worthy of this proud prerogative. For power implies responsibility. Wifehood, motherhood—what a weight of obligation do these terms suggest! According as a woman realises their meaning, or fails to realise it, does she make or mar the happiness of her dearest. The infant who reposes on her breast, who looks up to her with that perfect trust which is the secret of a child's sway over our hearts—what is its life to be? Is it to be bright or dark, noble or base? It depends largely upon her. Humanly speaking, she holds her babe's fate

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs xxxi. 23-28.

<sup>2</sup> Yebamoth 63 a.

in her hands. Her instruction, her training, her counsel, may go far to lift him to the angels, or to consign him to the life of the brute. And observe that the alternatives are not merely influences that are positively good and positively bad, but firm and wise and vigilant guidance on the one hand, and loose, thoughtless, capricious treatment on the other. The seeds of a worthless life are sown as much by unwise discipline, or by no discipline, as by directly vicious training. How terrible, then, is the responsibility of the parent, of the mother especially, seeing that upon her devolves the task of fashioning her child's disposition at a time when he is most impressionable! You have heard of the criminal who, on his way to execution, obtains leave to say farewell to his mother. He goes to her, and smites her on the cheek, saying, 'Hadst thou done thy duty, I should not be going forth to a shameful death.' Ah! how much sin and woe may not be laid at the door of a mother's folly, ay, even of a mother's fondness! But, on the other hand, what nobility, what peace of mind, what joy has not sprung from a mother's wisdom! A kiss from his mother made Benjamin West a painter; just such a kiss has set a consecrating seal upon many a man's life, and kept it from going down to the pit. Think of it, my sisters, and realise

the extent of your power, the sanctity of your mission. Think of it, and deem no thought too painful, no anxiety too deep, no effort too exacting, which you bestow upon the training of the little ones you have received from God. To them you have given life; crown the gift by teaching them to use life well—to their true happiness. Pray with all your might for help, for insight, for understanding, so that your motherhood may be a blessing to your children, not a curse, so that your memory when you have gone hence may be a constant inspiration, urging them to higher and yet higher peaks of goodness, a cherished flower kept alive by the warmth of their soul's love. This is what is meant by being a strong woman—strong for good, not, as Jezebel was, for evil.

But the more obvious lesson of our story is the one that is less frequently learnt. All women know that they ought to exercise a salutary influence as mothers; but only a few understand that they have to exercise it as wives. And yet what a wide sphere of noble achievement here presents itself! What cannot a strong woman do to deepen the good instincts of her husband, to fortify the weak points in his moral armour, to throw the decisive weight into the scale when he is oscillating between right and wrong! What may she not do towards making him a God-fearing

man, towards turning his indifference to religion into unpretending, yet genuine piety! The Bible speaks sometimes of wise women, with whom great men readily take counsel. Every wife may be a wise woman, whose direction her husband may find it his joy and strength to seek, not only in affairs of the world, but in the far weightier matters of the true life—the life that is led for God.

‘You fancy, perhaps, as you have been told so often, that a wife’s rule should only be over her husband’s house, not over his mind. Ah no! the true rule is just the reverse of that; a true wife, in her husband’s house, is his servant; it is in his heart that she is queen. Whatever of best he can conceive, it is her part to be; whatever of highest he can hope, it is hers to promise; all that is dark in him she must purge into purity; all that is failing in him she must strengthen into truth; from her, through all the world’s clamour, he must win his praise; in her, through all the world’s warfare, he must find his peace.’<sup>1</sup>

Ah, what may not a man do and become in a good woman’s hands! What may he not do and become in the hands of a weak woman! There are crises when a single word is enough to turn the whole current of a life into a noble channel; but let that word be unspoken—

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin: *The Crown of Wild Olive*, iii.

it may be a word of encouragement or of expostulation—and the stream rushes on, to dash itself against the rocks. It is often given to the wife to say that word. Living apart from the storm and stress of the world, she is less tempted; her finest instincts are less liable to be blunted by expediency, or clouded by passion. She can guide often by a touch so subtle as to be almost unfelt, by an influence which the object of it scarcely recognises as external. Where is the woman who will not essay to play such a part? For what prouder possession can a wife have than the ability to step between her husband and his baser self, than the consciousness that bespattered though he is, in the fierce race of life, the soil can always be removed by her ministering hands, that in her he has a second soul, reinforcing with its impulse the feebler promptings of his own spirit? The Talmud<sup>1</sup> tells how Akiba, the great sage, once returns in triumph to his place, after a long absence, at the head of a legion of disciples. A crowd gathers to do him honour. Suddenly from the throng there rushes forth a woman, ragged, wan, hollow-eyed, and throws herself into his arms. The students would repulse her, but Akiba restrains them. 'Forbid her not,' he

<sup>1</sup> Nedarim, 50 a.; Aboth de R. Nathan, ed. Schechter, p. 82 a.

cries, 'she is my wife, and what I am, and what you are, we have become through her; she has been my inspiration.' A proud moment for that patient, devoted heart, who had obtained her reward at last! And what woman may not experience moments of almost equal ecstasy? She has but to be strong, to be true to her mission as the helpmate of her husband, to aid in preserving his integrity when its stability is sorely threatened, to cry, when he is discouraged and sad because rectitude is hard to keep in this crooked world, 'Let thy heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard' —the pleasant vineyard of a conscience at rest —and the hour of her triumph is come. She has been his salvation. She has risen to the level of her womanhood. She has tasted the sweets of power—power far transcending in joyousness the might of the king on his throne — the power of one soul to imbue another with its own strength, and to lift it by magnetic force from earth to heaven.

## ART AND MORALS

'See, the Lord hath called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah ; and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge . . . to work in all manner of cunning workmanship. And He hath put in his heart that he may teach.'—EXODUS xxxv. 30-34.

THE old-world artist of whom the text speaks—Bezalel, the designer of Israel's first House of Prayer—is endowed not only with the artistic faculty, but with the power of imparting his sublime thoughts to others. The spirit of wisdom and understanding and knowledge which illuminates his own soul, leaps, under the magic of his personality, to other souls, and sets them afame. God, we are told, 'hath put it in his heart that he may teach.' This, too, is a gift of God to him—this power of self-communication, of disclosing his beautiful dreams to others, of exalting them as he himself has been exalted. It is the endowment needed to complete and crown the artistic gift, to redeem it from sterility. For of what use is it to see the sublime, if the

vision is for ever locked up in the seer's soul? Of what use is it to be a master-spirit, and yet not to teach? The artist's only true glory, his only true work, lies in revealing those higher peaks he himself has trodden in spirit, in lifting others, in however small a degree, nearer to God and duty.

This is a position which will be assailed with a storm of denial, and from no quarter so fiercely as from the artistic world itself. 'We have nothing to consider,' say the painter, the sculptor, the playwright, 'but Art. She alone is our mistress. What we have to strive after is what is artistically true, not what is morally beautiful. *Æsthetics*, not ethics, is our all-sufficient guiding principle.' This is what we are told nowadays in language so different from that of the old Bible teachers, who saw in every great intellectual endowment the gift of God, and in every artist a prophet—nay, in language so different from that of a Giotto, a Dante, a Michelangelo, who lived and wrought only that they might teach the most exalted of all truths, and spread a love of the beauty that is divine. Alas for the contrast between the old and the new! Alas for the anomaly by which an age like ours, conspicuous for material and scientific progress, should have as its other characteristic so great a decadence in the artistic ideal!

For not only is it true that an un-moral, which so easily degenerates into an immoral, Art, means the loss of a splendid opportunity for uplifting the world, it is also true that a narrow conception of the function of Art means a lack of moral depth in both artist and public. A low artistic ideal is the symptom of a low ethical ideal. Art has never really flourished in a morally degenerate age; for it has had no congenial soil to nourish it. And thus the artist is the mirror of his time. If he works under a deep sense of the solemnity of his gift and his mission, if he remembers always that 'truth and goodness and beauty are but different faces of the same All,'<sup>1</sup> and that therefore he must seek to embody only that true beauty which reveals and inspires goodness, then his age is an age of high moral endeavour in all things, and, in prophetic phrase,<sup>2</sup> wisdom and knowledge and the fear of God are indeed the stability of his times. But if, on the contrary, he flings to the winds all thoughts of responsibility to a Power higher even than his Art, if the beauty he would embody is the false, dead beauty into which no breath of a divine life has been breathed—then be sure that a debased conception of duty is the note of his day, and that his own materialism is

<sup>1</sup> Emerson on *Beauty*.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

but the reflection of the materialism of his generation.

Well, if this be so, what are we to say of the ethical character of our age as it is revealed by contemporary Art? Can we truly affirm that there is no perceptible decline in the artistic ideal? Compare the average work of the modern painter with that of his predecessor of only a century back. Beauty there still is of a sort, fidelity to technical rules, unquestionable skill; but is the tone as dignified, the purpose as pure? Make the comparison with the works of the great masters of the Middle Ages, and the contrast is more striking still. We look in vain for that revelation of the consciousness of a sacred mission, for that inspiration in the larger sense of the word, of which the message uttered with brush and canvas by the painter-prophets of olden days so eloquently tells. We read of Michelangelo leading a life of rigid self-denial such as the Talmudic Rabbins<sup>1</sup> were wont to prescribe as the true life for the followers of the Torah, almost literally eating bread with salt and drinking water by measure, sleeping on the earth and living laborious days; for often, we learn, he was satisfied with a piece of bread, which he would eat while he went on working; he

Boraitha of R. Meir.

would frequently lie down in his clothes and rise after a few hours' sleep to go on with his labour.<sup>1</sup> To him might well be applied the lines of the modern poet:

'How spread their lures for him in vain  
Thieving ambition and paltering Gain !  
He thought it happier to be dead,  
To die for beauty than live for bread.'

Nay, do we not know how Michelangelo strove to ensure for his countrymen that freedom and justice, the glory of which he figuratively extolled in some of his greatest works?<sup>2</sup> What parallel to this sustained patriotism, this splendid self-denial, has the modern artist to offer? The most successful of recent novels<sup>3</sup> contains a description, evidently truthful, of Parisian artist-life, in which a reckless self-indulgence is the central feature. One man forms the exception to the general debasement; but his nobility of character only accentuates the degradation of his companions. Is it necessary to ask what sort of pictures such men can produce? For the stream rises no higher than its source, and the artist can put no more into his work than he has in his own soul. If the

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Lilly: *Chapters in European History*, chap. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *The History of David Grieve*, by Mrs. Humphrey Ward.

soul is debased, the work, too, must be vile. Modern French art supplies only too many instances of this mournful truth; and it is modern French art, with its distorted aims, as well as its undoubtedly brilliant execution, which is finding wider homage in this country year after year. We have only to think of the latest phases in the history of English painting and of the English drama, in order to recognise the truth of this assertion.

I say that this decadence in Art means moral decay, none the less real because it is slow. I say that the Art which scorns all point of contact with morals, which denies all responsibility as a teacher and knows no law but itself—nay, which evokes from the artist no real self-restraint, no recognition of the consecrating power of his gift, is a sterile Art which has missed its purpose. Nay, it is an Art that is doomed. It may be outwardly fair to look upon, but its fairness is as the hectic flush of the fruit with the canker at its core. It is told of Amiel, the Genevese thinker, that 'he came to his desk as to an altar;' for he found an 'almost religious delight in the exercise of his power of sustained and concentrated thought.'<sup>1</sup> It is only such a feeling, which is at once self-

<sup>1</sup> *Amiel's Journal* (English edition), Introduction, p. xxxvii.

worship and self-abasement, that can produce any abiding, because any genuine, any fruitful Art.

And here let me not be misunderstood. I am far from saying that every artistic production, whether it be a picture or a play, a poem or a piece of sculpture, should necessarily have a direct moral purpose, that it should avowedly set itself to preach a homily. All that I contend is that the artist should look upon his work as a possible moral teacher, and that therefore he should conceive it in such wise as to exclude all danger of debasing those whom it is intended to delight. That this sense of responsibility is not more vivid than it is, only proves how a passion for certain forms of Art or, worse still, a sordid self-interest, can blind keen-sighted men to the duty that is laid upon them by the most familiar facts. Think of the hundreds and thousands of untutored working people who crowd the Exhibition of the Royal Academy on a popular day, or who flock to some collection of pictures at the East End ; or think again of the multitude whom no Church, perhaps no religion, can claim, filling the theatres night after night; and then measure the folly, the guilt, of the painter or the dramatist who, not content with merely losing this splendid ethical opportunity, deliberately makes the occasion one for

ministering to evil thoughts and desires. The artist disclaims responsibility; he cannot do it without passing sentence upon himself. He calls himself the apostle of truth; but how can that be a delineation of the truth whose effects are morally false? Nay, what is truth? Is it what the eye sees? is it not rather what is discerned by the soul? The Art that is worthy of its name, will pluck the truth from the darkest depths, summon beauty from amid the most sordid surroundings. It is possible to treat morally of immorality, to tell a tale of vice in such a way as to make it hateful. Everything depends upon the spirit in which the artist works. It is not the medium he employs, but the manner of its employment, that makes his effort either shameful or sublime. Beneath his touch ugliness may be transformed into beauty, beauty distorted into ugliness. It is the latter method which is chosen by the so-called realism of modern times. Its portraiture of the lower side of human nature too often panders only to a low curiosity, and when its theme is beauty it is the fictitious beauty that appeals for its supremacy to the verdict of the senses.

It is because Art persists in mistaking its function, because it cannot measure its own greatness, that it fails to exert its legitimate effect upon the morality of the age. And so

a mighty force, which in these days of irreligion might fight on the side of righteousness, either holds aloof or goes over to the enemy. It is a sad thought. You will ask why I press it upon you. You are not artists, you will say, and there is nothing in a state of decay, which affects Art no less than morals, that you can mend. But is this really so? You are part of the public, and with the public it finally rests to purge Art of its sickly fancies, to fill it with healthier, nobler dreams and a truer self-respect. Let but the patrons of the picture-gallery and the theatre declare that they will be content no longer with productions that degrade Art and morals simultaneously, and with a true artistic revival there will be born a new ethical force. Then Art will prove itself an inspiration once more—the fruit of that spirit of God which uplifts its possessor, the source of ennoblement for the thousands who are consoled and gladdened by its manifestations. Once more the Beautiful will be the Good. The artist will resume his rightful place among the elect. He will be the teacher, the prophet, proclaiming the truth—the truth he has won on the heights—and gaining for it the reverence and the homage of the world.

## ‘SPEAK, LORD, FOR THY SERVANT HEARETH’

*(A Sermon for Children)*

‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’—*1 SAMUEL* iii. 9.

I THINK it would be a good plan if, following an old Jewish custom, children were to learn by heart short texts from the Bible, and make them their mottoes. The words I have just quoted would make a beautiful motto: ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ I should like all of you to learn them by heart; for they are words that were spoken by a child like yourselves, and they may be looked upon as having formed the motto of his noble life.

You have heard in the Bible-lesson I read a few moments ago something about the child who spoke these words, and how he came to speak them. The child was Samuel, and, child though he was, his history is wonderful. His mother, in gratitude, had promised to give him to the Lord; and so, as soon as he was old enough to leave her, she took him to God’s house at Shiloh, where the Israelites used to meet for worship, and

left him there under the charge of the High Priest Eli. There, after a time, he was able to perform little useful tasks, and thus is spoken of in the Bible as ‘ministering unto the Lord.’ A rather grand description, you might think, of a child’s work. But though the tasks were little—one of them was to open and shut the doors of the holy House—they were useful, and they were done for God. The most earnest of grown-up ministers could not do better. One is reminded of the words in the Psalms,<sup>1</sup> ‘I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness; for the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory.’

Yes, the Lord will give grace and glory; remember that, children. The humblest acts, which are all that a child can perform, become full of grace and glory—a splendid worship—when they are of service to others, when they are done for God’s sake.

But in usefulness and virtue even children can ‘go from strength to strength.’ They can go up higher in goodness, higher in God’s class, just as they can work their way up in school. The child Samuel was soon to discover this. He was not always to be a doorkeeper, to linger on the threshold of the Sanctuary,

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxxxiv. 10.

and know but little of the sublime things that were going on within. No doubt, the holiness of the place spoke already to his heart, and filled it with a vague sense of solemnity. But now the indistinct murmurs were to cease, and a clear voice was to take their place. God was going to honour this child by speaking to him. You have heard how it happened. Samuel lies down to sleep one night, when in the solemn stillness of the holy House he hears his name spoken, ‘Samuel, Samuel.’ He does not know that the voice is God’s; how should he, for he is but a child? He runs to Eli, but it was not he that had called. A second time and a third the same thing occurs. ‘Samuel, Samuel,’ says the voice. ‘Here am I,’ the boy cries in turn to Eli. Then the old priest understands. He tells the child what he is to do, what he is to say. And when for the fourth time the voice calls, it is to God that the child makes his reply, ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’

Is not this a beautiful story? God, ‘the Almighty, Supreme and Awful Being,’ as we call Him in our prayers, the Maker and the King, not only of this vast world, but of myriads of yet vaster worlds that human eye cannot even see—this great God speaking to a little child, condescending to tell him His will, His plans; speaking, too, not in loud and

terrible tones that fill and shake the Universe, but in a still small voice that reaches only one heart. A beautiful story ; for God's greatness is never seen so clearly as in the moment when He puts aside His grandeur, when He bends down and talks to little children, and blesses humble folk, and comforts the forsaken and the friendless and the poor.<sup>1</sup>

But the story is most beautiful because it is true in the widest sense of the word, because it is a picture of what is going on every day, every moment. Do you think that Samuel is the only child that God has spoken to ? Do you think that God spoke to children only in olden times, in the wondrous days of the Bible ? No ; He speaks to every child in every age. He is speaking to you, my children, always ; He is speaking to you now. You cannot hear Him, you will say ; but so it was with Samuel. Three times he heard a voice, but knew not that it was God's. He did not recognise it ; he thought it was the familiar voice of Eli. So, God is ever calling to you, but you do not know it. He speaks to you in tones that you are accustomed to, so that you may not be afraid ; but just because you are accustomed to them you fail to see that it is really the great God that is calling. I do not mean, of course, that He speaks to you in words, but

<sup>1</sup> See Note X.

in acts and things. For you will easily see that it is possible to express what one means, without speaking. Think how much we ourselves can say in a smile or a frown, a sob or a tear. The joy that no tongue can describe may be revealed in one bright glance; a piteous look may tell the anguish of a lifetime. Nay, some of you know the compositions of the great musician, Mendelssohn, which he has called *Songs without Words*. He has written the music, and left it to tell its own tale, to be understood by each heart in its own way. This is God's plan too. He is ever calling to us, but He never utters a syllable. The whole universe, the whole of life, is full of songs without words—songs telling all kinds of wonderful things about God, that differ with the ear that hears the music, and the heart that cherishes it.

For children—children who will only listen—God has a special message suited to their tiny minds and their little lives. The most familiar things, as I have said, speak that message. God calls to you in the wonders of earth and sea and sky. In the radiant sun by day and the countless stars by night, in the mighty waves that toss the big ship like a toy, in the lofty mountain clad with eternal snow, in the marvels that most of you have seen, and all of you have read about, He calls to you,

and tells you of His power. He bids you see His wisdom too. He bids you see it in the wonderful way in which He has made all living things, both great and small, and gives them their food in its due season, and saves them from perishing. The delicate wing of the fly that sails so swiftly through the air, the great trunk of the elephant that tears up the forest trees by the roots, the industrious ant that stores up her food during the summer in readiness for the winter's scarcity, the clever bee that builds the honeycomb—a palace of sweetmeats such as story-books tell of, only real—nay, you yourselves, with your thinking minds, your beating hearts, your hands that can grasp and write and sew, your feet so slender, yet able to support your bodies and to keep them from falling, your eyes that look out on the world and tell the brain all they see—all this God has made, and in all He reminds you of His wisdom. 'Fearfully and wonderfully am I made,' cries the Psalmist, 'and that my soul knoweth right well.'<sup>1</sup> Love, too, is God's message. The birds that make you glad with their gladness, that delight you with their music, the flowers that look so fair, that smell so sweet, the sunset whose splendour no painter can imitate with all his colours, the beauty of the country-side—all things in

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxxxix. 14.

Nature that please and charm and gladden—tell you that God is kind and good. Nay, never has He shown His love more plainly than in giving you loving parents, who are ever thinking how they may make you happy, how they may save you from the slightest harm—ever, in the words of Scripture, keeping you as the apple of their eye.

Thus, then, does God call to you. If you do not recognise His voice, it is because, like Samuel, you have not been used to listen for it. And yet the tiniest things that God's hands have made declare the loving-kindness, the wisdom and the might of the Heavenly Father, with a voice as loud as a trumpet's. You have only to tell these things to speak to you, and they will obey. All Nature is an enchanted land; every flower and tree and creature will change into a fairy, and tell you all sorts of secrets, make the most beautiful promises, give you the best advice, if you only have the magic wand.

And what is that wand? It is a thoughtful mind and a loving heart. Only think about God, and He will speak to you. Look for Him—look for Him in the objects you are always seeing in the heavens above and on the earth beneath, in yourselves, your lives—and you will find Him. He will tell you about Himself and of your duty. He will

promise you happiness, and show you how you may gain it. But if, after you have found Him, He is to stay with you, if, having begun to speak to you, He is to speak to you always, you must have love in your hearts, and reverence and obedience. For what is the use of God calling to you if you do not answer? What is the use of hearing Him call if you do not obey His voice? Far better not to have the magic wand that changes dumb Nature into thousands of speaking tongues, if we rudely and wilfully disregard what they say. No; we must hear, and obey. It is not enough to *feel* good, one must *be* good, which is a much harder task—a task that demands constant watchfulness, constant battling with our own inclinations and wishes, constant denial to ourselves of what we like most. Calling to the child in our story, God utters his name twice, 'Samuel, Samuel.' Our wise men say that one word was a token of love, the other a call to activity. In such wise does God call to each of you. 'Child, child,' He says, 'I love you; if you would know how dearly, look around you, and see how I provide for your happiness every moment of your life. Be worthy, then, of my love. Be active; be resolute. Work; work to be wise, to be noble. Let every day, as it passes, make you stronger and taller—stronger in fighting for

what is right and good, taller by being able to reach up nearer to heaven.'

And what should be your answer to this gracious message? Shall it not be Samuel's? —'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' 'Speak, Lord,' you must say, 'tell me more of Thy will and my duty. I am but a child, but I would do all that a child should do that loves Thee, and would prove his love. Thy servant heareth; I would find my greatest delight in serving Thee—in serving Thee by serving my fellow-men. Thy works proclaim Thee good and wise; I would be good and wise too. I would be gentle and patient and truthful; I would strive to make others happy rather than myself. Speak, Lord; speak to me always, for the love with which Thou surroundest me I will humbly strive to repay with love.' Ah, dear children, the best wish I can frame for you is that you may be endowed with the wisdom to feel this prayer, and with the strength to fulfil the beautiful longings it breathes. May God grant it! Amen.

## ‘IT IS SOON GONE, AND WE FLY AWAY’

‘The days of our years are threescore years and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore years ; yet is their pride but travail and nothingness ; for it is soon gone, and we fly away.’—PSALM xc. 10.

‘FOR it is soon gone, and we fly away’—here the poet strikes one of those solemn, those sad notes which occasionally mingle with the joyous strains of Hebrew thought. It is a seemingly pessimistic utterance, which contrasts, but does not really conflict, with the wonted optimism of the Scriptures. The brevity of human life, the rapid flight of time that moves more swiftly than a weaver’s shuttle—this truth would naturally oppress the thinkers among the ancient Israelites no less than their contemporaries among the Gentiles. But in their case the reflection is not suffered to be sterile. If it makes them sad, they will be sad to some purpose. Only for a moment does the Psalmist yield himself to melancholy ; speedily does his soul shake itself free from its despondency,

and soar upwards, toward God. If life is short even when longest, it need not be barren ; if, when their threescore years and ten are ended, men fly away—fly away from this earthly scene like a bird that poises itself for a moment on the swaying branches, and then vanishes for ever, at least let those years be well spent. Their very fewness makes them all the more precious ; the aching sense of life's emptiness, which comes to every thinking man and woman at some time or other, is a direct command to make life full and fruitful and satisfying.

And so it is that the poet cries out from the depths of his sadness to God on high—cries out, not as the avowed pessimist would, against the cruelty which has made life a void, but as the religionist must, for the clear eye that discerns life's true purpose, for the strong soul that courageously realises it. 'So teach us,' he exclaims, 'so teach us to number our days that we may get us a heart of wisdom. Teach us, O God, so to note the rapid flight of time that we may conceive the desire and the determination to use it wisely. Let the sense of life's brevity beget in us neither a despairing inactivity nor a reckless self-indulgence, but energy and self-suppression. Let us catch these fleeting years of ours as they hurry past us, and compel each to yield some fulfilled

duty, to leave with us some blessing. For this is true wisdom ; it is the one supreme philosophy which surpasses and comprehends all the rest.'

The Psalmist's train of thought is one which peculiarly harmonises with the associations of a season of the year which the ordinance of the Synagogue has made a period of counting. The Mosaic command to number the fifty days that intervene between Passover and Pentecost is literally obeyed even now ; for, night after night, the time that has elapsed since the Festival of Freedom is solemnly proclaimed in the synagogues. It is a fitting season, then, at which to speak of a wise treasuring of life's opportunities. For this formal act of counting the days one by one, whatever the object with which it was originally instituted, may suggest and typify for us that wise numbering of all our days, of which the Psalmist speaks. There is something peculiarly impressive in this quaint rite, which the Synagogue still jealously preserves. Amid the deepening shadows and the impressive stillness of the night the voice rings out : ' So many days since the great Feast. So many days gone—irrevocably gone, never to return.' Surely it is as though yet another voice were crying out in the recesses of the soul : ' So many days since, like the nation of Israel at the moment of

redemption, thou wast born, since thou wast launched on thy new-found world, free to work thine own will. So many days gone out of thy life. What art thou doing with it? If it were to end at this moment, what would be the verdict passed upon it—success or failure? When the end does come, when the night settles down on thy soul at last, and thou art entering the valley of the shadows, what account wilt thou give of it?'

For good or for evil the old ceremony is dying out. But the question it has always put to those who have taken part in it with sympathetic hearts is the one eternal question that is addressed to all of us whether we carry out the rite or not. It is an imperious question, which insists upon an answer: What am I doing with my life—this life of mine that is going so quickly, that was given to me, like every other of God's gifts, in trust? It is a question which must present itself to all, however thoughtless and frivolous and selfish. If it come not at our invitation—our wise invitation—in times of peace, it will come unbidden in moments of turmoil, at some crisis when the citadel of self-love, in which we have intrenched ourselves, has been shaken to its foundations, when our easy-going philosophy has shrivelled up before some scorching

trouble, and all the desirable things in which we have believed and trusted, and for which we have lived our life, have crumbled into dust.

But whatever the moment at which this stern self-questioning is performed, it is seldom, I fear, that the answer is really satisfactory. For who is there that in his own heart can wholly approve of his conduct of life? Strive, as we may, to keep before us a noble conception of its meaning, we shall yet have to confess that in practice we have fallen short of it. Not that it is given to any man to reach his ideal. The sublime dreams that visit the noblest souls, and make their years resplendent with their inspiration, are for ever doomed to remain partly unfulfilled. Yet at least it may be said that these souls have striven to make their dreams true; and the endeavour is their crown. But what you and I and mortals of ordinary clay have to deplore, as we look back on the vanished years, is not the contrast between the actual and the ideal, but the chasm between the actual and the possible—between what we have done and what we could have done. It is lost opportunities that we have to regret, the neglect of duties that lay about our daily path—in the home, in the place of business, in the work-a-day world—the thrusting aside of angel-hands

that were stretched out to touch ours, half-commanding, half-pleading !

' What is the course of the life  
Of mortal men on the earth ?  
Most men eddy about  
Here and there—eat and drink,  
Chatter and love and hate,  
Gather and squander, are raised  
Aloft, are hurled in the dust,  
Striving blindly, achieving  
Nothing ; and then they die—  
Perish ! and no one asks  
Who or what they have been,  
More than he asks what waves  
In the moonlit solitude wild  
Of the midmost ocean have swelled,  
Foamed for a moment, and gone.'

In a modified sense the poet's description applies to us too. We never rise to the height of life's great argument. The years come and go, and bring us nearer to the end, but no nearer to the aim, of our pilgrimage. For all our threescore years and ten there is little to show save a harvest of weeds. Truly 'their pride is but travail and nothingness ; for it is soon gone, and we fly away.'

It is a melancholy thought. But the antidote is not to be found in railing at life, or at Him who gave it to us. If the vanished years have yielded little but disappointment, the fault

lies only with ourselves. The secret how to make life fruitful, and therefore satisfying, has been imparted to us; if we use not our knowledge, we alone are to blame. We know that Duty is the key to the one all-embracing mystery—the mystery that lies in our living at all; yet it is anything but Duty that we take in our hands when we are building up the fabric of practical life. ‘What shall a man do to live?’ cries the old Jewish sage, and his own lips reply: ‘Slay himself’—kill all that is base and selfish and contemptible in his heart, and let the nobler elements grow. But too many of us adopt the directly opposite policy, and then wonder that life is empty—a failure. ‘What shall a man do to die?’ asks the same teacher, and again he answers himself: ‘Live’—live as the world understands the word—live for the lower self, live the life that is but death.<sup>1</sup>

No; for those who take the right view of it, life can never be disappointing. Pessimism and Religion are incompatible ideas. Base your conception of happiness on selfish enjoyment, and you build on the sand. A thousand chances will league themselves against you. Your wealth may take to itself wings, or breed only that insatiable longing for more which is poverty itself. Your pleasures may pall, and

<sup>1</sup> Tamid, 32a.

beget a weariness that is truly misery ; or, after long wooing, they may visit you too late, when the physical capacity for enjoyment has fled. But base your happiness on self-renunciation, which, as Goethe has told us, is

‘The burden of the eternal song  
Which every hour *our* whole life long  
Sings softly to us’

—base your happiness on the triumph of the nobler instincts in your breast, on the scattering of blessings about you as you go, and you build on the rock. Though all the world’s malignant forces band themselves together against you, they can effect nothing. They cannot rob you of your integrity—your integrity that is beyond the reach of every power in the Universe save your own will. You are master of your own fate. You come in very sooth, in power as well as in rectitude, as near to God as is possible for mortal man. Is not life worth living then ? Who will wish to shuffle off this mortal coil, seeing that so many flowers are entwined with it—flowers whose beauty never fades, whose sweetness never cloys ? Life becomes an object of desire, not a weary burden to be cast aside with a sigh of relief.

And here we reach the essential distinction between the opposing views of life, held re-

spectively by the pessimist and the religionist. The one welcomes death as a release from misery ; the other greets it in the spirit of the earnest toiler, who hails the advent of evening as the herald of a repose that has been earned by work well done. The pious Israelite, as he numbers the days at this time of the year, counts, not to the Pentecost that is coming, but from the Passover that is gone. He looks back, not forward. And so it is with all those who make Religion the basis of their life's philosophy, the true inspiration of their life's work. They do not look forward to death, the liberator. When it comes in God's good time they will be ready for it. If they anticipate it with feelings that are free from dread, they are also far from awaiting it with longing. Their true mission lies here—in this world, with all its difficulties and sorrows ; and in conquering them is the noblest task they can achieve. Effort, struggle—these are the elements out of which their glory is to be fashioned. Rather do they look backward, counting the time that is gone, weighing its fruits, numbering the hand-breadths by which it has brought them nearer to God.<sup>1</sup>

Nor, lastly, will he who is penetrated by the true religious spirit be ever looking onward to the end of this earthly existence as

<sup>1</sup> See Note XI.

the beginning of the Heavenly one. He will dream at times of the bliss that awaits the liberated spirit ‘beyond these voices’—dream of it, and find comfort and courage in the vision. But still he will find his most frequent joy amid the elements of his daily life—in his work which, done nobly, is itself a blessing, in the ecstasy of the fight with evil, in the integrity which is the answer he flings back to the challenge of sorrow, in the glad weaving of a sublime pattern out of the commonplace threads of worldly experience. The celestial vision upon which his thoughts will chiefly dwell is that which may be realised on this earth—realised by his own righteousness, which springs like a bright flower from the soil of the world—realised by the gleams of light that have stolen from his soul into many a darkened one, by the joy he has given to them that grieve, the peace he has brought to them that suffer, the strength, the salvation, he has bestowed on the feeble ones that were about to perish. For true is the poetic saying, ‘Tis Heaven must come, not we must go;’ assuredly Heaven must be here, built up by our toiling hands, before we can deserve to enter the City of God, the City Celestial.

Ah, may we all come ever nearer to the realisation of this ideal! For then we shall no

more be sorrowful because of the emptiness of our life, or because of the swiftness with which it passes. 'It is soon gone, and we fly away.' It is true. But we need not go till our work is done; and when we take wing it should be with no sob of grief, but with the happy song of the bird that turns towards a sunnier clime.



## NOTES

NOTE I. (page 35).—‘Any one of the measures employed against the Jews would be enough to “convert” three-fourths of the Christians of Russia to Shamanism or Buddhism in a week; and the circumstance that about six million persecuted and miserable wretches remain steadfastly faithful to a religion that causes their life to be changed into a fiery furnace without the angel to keep it cool, is the nearest approach to a grandiose miracle that has been vouchsafed to this unbelieving generation.’—‘The Jews in Russia,’ by E. B. Lanin: *Fortnightly Review*, October 1890, p. 498.

NOTE II. (page 45).—The Talmud (Menachoth, 110a) describes the Almighty as saying to Israel, ‘Think not that in offering Sacrifice ye are doing My pleasure; ye are doing your own.’ The text quoted in support of this idea is Levit. xix. 5: ‘Ye shall offer it at your own will.’

NOTE III. (page 46).—This view is expressed in the following parable:—A king has a son who has accustomed himself to eat unclean meats. The king determines that the prince shall henceforth eat at the royal table daily, thus preventing him from indulging his bad habit. So with Israel; he is given to idolatry, and, in order to wean him from the sin, the Almighty decrees that he shall bring his sacrifices to the Tabernacle. (Vayikra Rabbah on

Levit. xvii. 3.) Compare the following Talmudic sayings: “‘At present,’ the Almighty says to Israel, ‘Sacrifice is thy atonement, but in the days to come I will pardon thee without Sacrifice;’ and thus it is written, ‘I, even I, will *Myself* blot out thy transgressions’” (Tanchuma on *Shemini*). ‘He that studies and obeys the Torah, needs neither burnt-offering nor sin-offering’ (Menachoth, 110 a). ‘He that hath an ox or a dove may bring it as a sacrifice; but he that hath nought may bring words of penitence, for it is written, ‘Take with you words, and return unto the Lord’’ (Tanchuma on *Tsav*).

NOTE IV. (page 46).—See Maimonides, *Morē Nebuchim*, iii. 30, and Abravanel’s *Introduction to Leviticus*.

NOTE V. (page 58).—‘The precepts of the Torah were given solely in order to make men pure,’ is an aphorism of the Rabbins, uttered with especial reference to the dietary laws. (Bereshith Rabbah, chap. 44; Yalkut on Levit. xi. 2.)

NOTE VI. (page 126).—The Rabbins seem to have perceived this truth. The Almighty, according to the Talmud, appears once to Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedath, when the latter, who is very poor, asks how long he is to endure so much misery. ‘My son,’ is the reply, ‘wouldst thou have Me destroy the world for thy sake?’ (Taanith, 25 a.)

NOTE VII. (page 137).—Compare Psalm xciv. 12. God’s three best gifts, says the Talmud, have been won through suffering: the Torah, the Land of Promise, and Eternal Life (Berachoth, 5 a).

